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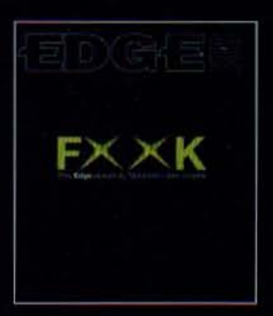
EDGE®

The Xbox has landed. Microsoft's next-generation hardware is real and it's finished. **Edge** has taken delivery of one of the first test machines, plus review copies of Halo, Munch's Oddysee, Project Gotham, Amped and Fuzion Frenzy

FXXK

Why **Edge** swears by Microsoft's new console





Like some rare celestial alignment, every five years or so the electronic entertainment industry throws up a new generation of hardware. And with the arrival of Microsoft's Xbox console in the **Edge** office, the cycle is now complete.

The hardware manufacturers have delivered on their promises (a few interminable delays notwithstanding), the software imagineers are busy exploring this new landscape, and we're now standing on the cusp of the biggest wave of videogaming this planet has ever witnessed.

As the exclamation on the cover suggests, you should ignore the naysayers and doom-merchants who have ignorantly dismissed Xbox out-of-hand. It's expensive, corpulent, and the joypads aren't entirely ergonomic – but by the gods is it powerful. And if only one out of every 20 games is anywhere near the quality of *Halo*, then **Edge** will be happy enough.

Accordingly, this issue's review section is one that gamers can usually only dream of: not only do we have the first, real Xbox discs to play (sadly, *Dead Or Alive 3* has slipped through the net until next issue), but we also have the latest brain-dump of Shigeru Miyamoto, Naughty Dog's long-awaited opus *Jak And Daxter*, Sega's iconoclastic blaster *Rez*, plus the best that the PC has to offer in the shape of *Civilization III*. Sometimes this job really isn't at all bad...

But with the completion of the next-gen triumvirate, **Edge** felt it right to bid a fond farewell to Dreamcast, the best games machine that never was. **Edge**'s respect for the console is well documented, but as the release schedules dry up, shelves are cleared of hardware in readiness for the new wave, and software prices fall into the 'bargain bin' category, we felt it appropriate to look back and chronicle the Dreamcast's brief but glorious existence.

So all that remains is to point you in the direction of the next issue, when we'll be pitching PlayStation2 vs GameCube vs Xbox in a major next-gen group test, with detailed analyses of all three machines, industry opinion and a look forward to the big titles of 2002. Of course, if you're anything like us, you'll already be wondering how to plug three separate games machines into your TV, and where all those damn cables are going to go...

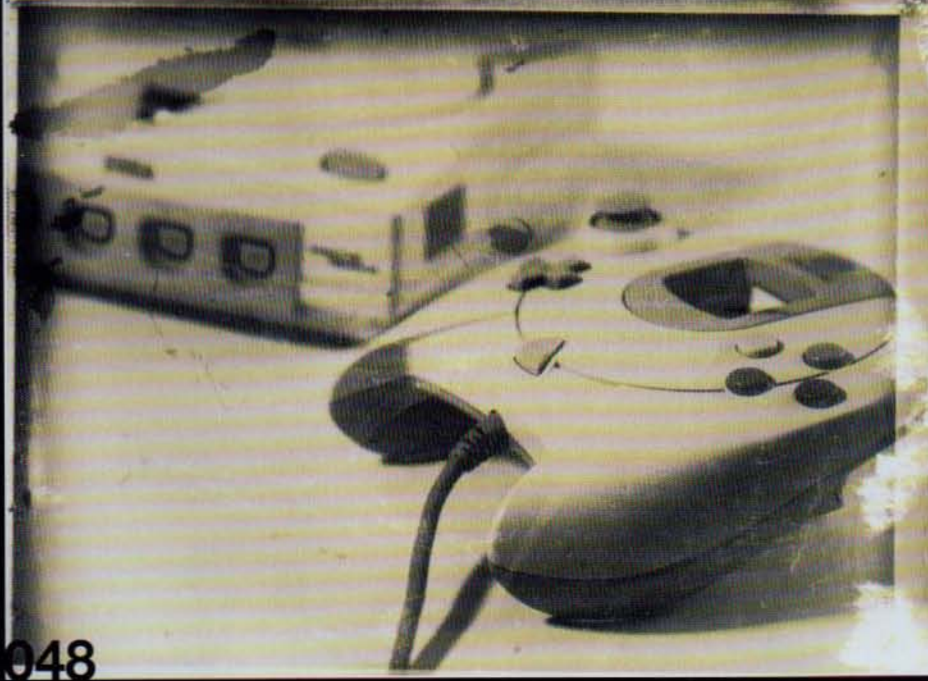


Features









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directory christmas

happy x-mas

Prescreen

Regulars

Testscreen

Production of Edge
Hardware: Power Macintosh G3, G4
Software: QuarkXPress, Adobe Photoshop, Macromedia FreeHand, and Microsoft Office **Typography:** (Adobe®) Helvetica [illegible], Thin, Light, Roman, **Medium**, **Bold**



Glamourous setting and celebrity DJs aside, the emphasis wa
firmly on the many games at Microsoft's X01 event in Canne

Microsoft shows Cannes do attitude

Microsoft finally gets its much-vaunted Xbox marketing campaign underway with an extravagant press junket in Cannes and a number of consumer roadshows in advance of the console's US debut



After nearly two years of rumour and speculation, Microsoft's Xbox finally became a reality as the system went on sale in North America on November 15. However, it's not set to appear on these shores until March 14 next year, when it will launch at a price of £299. As **Edge** goes to press it is too early to determine just how successful the launch has been, but the Xbox publicity machine finally slipped into gear in timely fashion with the X01 press junket in Cannes on October 16 and 17.

During the week of its launch, the Xbox boasted a line-up of software that consisted of five firstparty titles, 14 thirdparty titles, and the promise that a further 20 will be available by Christmas. Offering both a comprehensive choice of genre, and a handful of games that are of genuinely high quality, it's a software line-up that compares well with the launch roster of any other console, past or present.

But with the exception of the US, where Xbox launches three days before GameCube, consumers won't be comparing Xbox games with the launch software of other consoles. By the time the unit is released in Japan, both GameCube and PlayStation2 will have had time to establish an installed base, while in Europe, the Xbox will be entering the market after a potentially lucrative Christmas period for the recently price-cut PlayStation2.





Sony's attempts to hijack the X01 event with cheeky billboards (above) bore little fruit, as attendees were chaperoned quickly to Pierre Cardin's mountainside retreat to try out Xbox for themselves



Smilebit chief, Shun Arai and Overseas Marketing Director, Hiroko Yokosuka, were on hand to demonstrate the developers' keenness to work with Xbox



With over 40 titles playable, this provided ample demonstration of what consumers can expect from Xbox – namely choice and quality

Nevertheless, after a particularly slow start, and one or two setbacks at E3 and the Tokyo Game Show, the Xbox bandwagon finally got the boost it needed with the X01 press junket in Cannes. The decision to fly nearly a thousand European media guests to Pierre Cardin's clifftop mansion, overlooking the spectacular Côte d'Azur, and to festoon the surrounding real estate with an imposing Xbox light show, was a ridiculously extravagant one, but it was a decision befitting the *arriviste* nature of the console in question.

But as an indication of Microsoft's will to succeed it was an impressive performance. From the moment guests arrived at the Teletubby/Austin Powers architectural fusion of the Maison Bulles, by way of a stately open-air amphitheatre bedecked with luminous circus performers, until the end of Carl Cox's set, it was clear that the company intends to pull out all the stops for its new console.

More impressive than the exotic location, the celebrity DJ and the scintillating lightshow, was the software that was on display throughout the Bubble house. With over 40 titles playable, and a healthy turnout from thirdparty publishers, this provided ample demonstration of what consumers can expect from Xbox – namely choice and quality. A genuinely enticing teaser trailer kicked off a formal presentation that was without doubt the most polished and slick performance that the Xbox team has so far put together – consisting of members of the Xbox management team and a broad cross-section of the European publishing and development communities detailing their strategy for Xbox.

Of course there were moments that gave pause for thought. Ed Fries, for example was perhaps a bit too keen to highlight the unprecedented realism that can be achieved with Xbox, pointing to





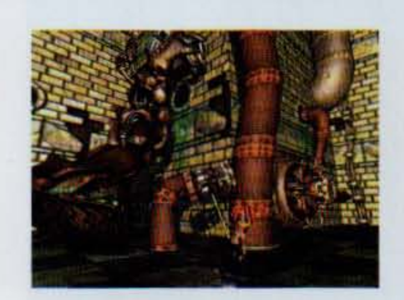


Included among the raft of the titles either announced or on show in Cannes were (clockwise from top left): *BC*, *Jet Set Radio Future*, RPG update *Morrowind* and *Galleon*









Also on display were (clockwise from top left): THQ's *Yager*, squad-based combat title *Brute Force*, firstparty motorsport title, *Rallisport Challenge*, and Argonaut's *Malice*

Among the more eloquent speakers to sing the praises of Xbox in Cannes were Oddworld's Lorne Lanning, Lionhead's Peter Molyneux and Microsoft's Seamus Blackley, who each testified to the power of Xbox



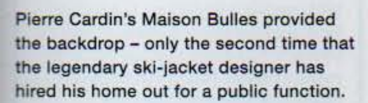












Pierre Cardin's Maison Bulles provided the backdrop – only the second time that the legendary ski-jacket designer has hired his home out for a public function.

sophisticated audio functionality, broadband connectivity, and an integral hard drive as the triumvirate of technological virtues upon which unparalleled verisimilitude can be based. Fortunately for attendees who might have been put off by such a monodynamic outlook, Smilebit was on hand with *Jet Set Radio Future* the following day to show that Xbox is capable of so much more.

And while some speakers were weak, the ebullience of the likes of Peter Molyneux and Lorne Lanning was adequate compensation. The former gave a characteristically charismatic overview of *Project Ego*, while the latter outlined the importance of connectivity to his vision of anti-capitalist flatulence. There were also one or two new firstparty titles announced, including *Rallisport Challenge* and team-based action title, *Brute Force*.

After Seamus Blackley had finished promoting the work of thirdparty developers, formal proceedings were brought to an end with the announcement, by Sandy Duncan, which the assembled masses had been most keen to hear. Xbox will launch in Europe on March 14, 2002, at a price of 479 or £299, with software costing 69 or £44.99 per game. Microsoft plans to roll out 1.5 million units over the course of three months, which will be manufactured in a specialist manufacturing plant in Hungary. With the formal presentation brought to a close, attendees were free to sample Xbox software for themselves, and to mull over the implications of the pricing announcement.

It's particularly revealing that the only real complaint was that there wasn't enough food (there certainly couldn't have been any complaints about a shortage of drink), though there were also gripes from certain sectors of the mainstream press, that the event was targeted too exclusively at the specialist press – presumably given Microsoft's shocking decision to showcase actual games. But given the window of opportunity that the Xbox launch date and price point hands to PlayStation2, there were some who questioned the usefulness of a press junket in convincing consumers to wait until next year to part with their cash. But X01 was just one part of a comprehensive marketing strategy, which



US Launch Dates

The five firstparty titles available on the day of launch were:

Halo
Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee
NFL Fever 2002
Project Gotham Racing
Fuzion Frenzy

These were joined by the end of the launch week, by the following thirdparty titles:

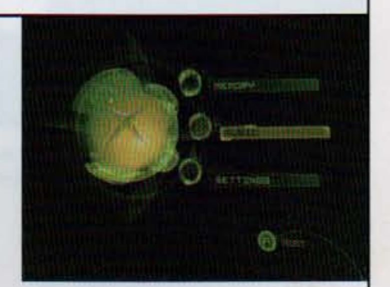
Dead or Alive 3 (Tecmo)
Madden NFL 2002 (Electronic Arts)
NASCAR Thunder 2002 (Electronic Arts)
Cel Damage (Electronic Arts)
NHL Hitz 2002 (Midway)
NASCAR Heat 2002 (Infogrames)
TransWorld Surf (Infogrames)
Test Drive Off Road – Wide Open (Infogrames)
Mad Dash Racing (Eidos)
Shrek (TDK)
4x4 Evo 2 (Godgames)
Dark Summit (THQ)
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2x (Activision)
AirForce Delta Storm (Konami)

Hands on

Yes it's bulky. Yes it's pretty ugly. Yes the controllers are fat. Yes it's from Microsoft. No it's not available in purple. But despite **Edge**'s European aesthetic reservations, it's difficult not to be captivated by Microsoft's behemoth – largely because, as Sandy Duncan was so keen to emphasise at X01, the Xbox is all about software. It's easy to overcome reservations about the Xbox's bombastic exterior when it's home to titles like *Halo* and *Amped*. Though **Edge** has had firsthand experience of Xbox hardware on several occasions, the arrival of an Xbox Debug kit provided the opportunity for a more leisurely examination.

The exterior of the Xbox can justifiably be described as ugly and large, especially when compared to the supercute styling of the GameCube, but the fact is that it isn't offensively so. Nevertheless, there are genuine concerns about the western controller design – particularly face buttons that prove difficult to locate precisely even after sustained play. In its favour, the two analogue sticks, the D-pad and the trigger buttons are solid and well constructed, but it's a shame that the prototype Japanese controllers to be found at X01 won't be introduced as standard.

When it comes to the console itself, Xbox has enough neat tricks to compensate for dodgy exterior embellishment. It plugged smoothly into **Edge**'s LAN to provide the sort of networked gaming that hasn't so far been available to console gamers, for example. The front end is fluid and smart, and the most obvious manifestation of the hard drive is seamless autosaving. Perhaps the most engaging feature, though, is the ability to rip your own music CDs for use ingame with certain titles. Via an absurdly foolproof menu system it's possible to cater for all your gaming audio tastes. Which means that extreme sports titles will no longer be synonymous with skate punk and nu-metal.







The Xbox front end may not be too pretty, but it's fast, fluid and intuitive



Carl Cox provided the climax to X01, along with dancing girls, but attendees were more interested in Xbox software









In general the price point and launch date were well-received at X01. Indeed the only real complaints were a lack of food and hard-to-find toilets thanks to confusing architecture



includes a raft of consumer-oriented promotions across the US and Europe.

It's apparent that Microsoft hopes initially to target the Xbox at the core gaming demographic, and then attempt to develop its audience from there with a price cut potentially coming later in the console's life-cycle. This is why the company has commenced a series of promotional tours to let this target audience playtest Xbox games for themselves.

The Xbox Oddysee is an appropriately boisterous 50-city tour of the US, accompanied by big name bands and competitions, while UK consumers will get a chance to catch an early glimpse of Xbox at a series of Xperience events across the country. There will also be a roll out of demo stations across the country from November.

The Xbox promotional campaign hasn't gone entirely smoothly, however, with reports emerging of demo stations crashing as a result of bug-infested code, and the infamous dotcom financial analyst Mary Meeker predicting huge losses for Microsoft over the course of the console's life. But with the machine finally in the hands of consumers, the time for speculation is nearing an end. X01 was Microsoft's first impressive step towards establishing a foothold in the console market. Game on.

It's apparent that Microsoft hopes to target the Xbox at the core gaming demographic and develop its audience from there

Recently Reviewed

Edge brings you a rundown of last issue's review scores

Title	Platform	Publisher	Developer	Score
Advance Wars	GBA	Nintendo	Intelligent Systems	9
Burnout	PS2	Acclaim	Criterion Games	8
Headhunter	DC	Sega	Amuze	8
Ico	PS2	SCEA	In-house	8
Commandos 2: Men of Courage	PC	Eidos Interactive	Pyro	7
Driven	GBA	Bam Entertainment	Crawfish Interactive	7
Airblade	PS2	SCEE	Criterion Games	6
Cosmic Smash	DC	Sega	Sega Rosso	6
Ace Combat 4	PS2	Namco	In-house	6
Gekibo 2	PS2	Irem	In-house	6
Lotus Challenge	PS2/Xbox	Virgin	Kuju Entertainment	6
Sky Gunner	PS2	SCEI	In-house	6
Ecks Vs Sever	GBA	Bam Entertainment	Crawfish Interactive	6
One Piece Mansion	PS	Capcom	In-house	6
Time Crisis II	PS2	Namco	In-house	6
Zero Gunner 2	DC	Sega	Psikyo	6
Dark Native Apostle	PS2	Virgin	Hudson	5
Silent Scope 2: Dark Silhouette	PS2	Konami	In-house	5
MX Rider	PS2/PC	Infogrames	Paradigm Entertainment	5
Phalanx	GBA	Big Ben Interactive	Kemco	5
Planet Monsters	GBA	Virgin	Planet Interactive Development	4

GCube Delay in Europe

By the time the Xbox launches in Japan, on February 22 next year, Nintendo will have had five months to determine whether its bid to reposition GameCube as a platform for all ages has been a success. Though it's unlikely to have made a serious dent in the massive installed base of PlayStation2, it could present Microsoft with a few problems if GameCube has established a secure foothold. By contrast, in the US, Xbox has had a three-day headstart on Nintendo's console, giving the two companies a more equal basis from which to begin their assault on the Sony hegemony.

However, in Europe, if rumours are to be believed, Microsoft will have the new entrant playing field all to itself. Reports in trade publication *MCV*, quoting anonymous retailers and publishers, point to Nintendo missing the anticipated March European launch date for GameCube. Worryingly for gamers, should the company miss this window the console is unlikely to appear until September. Worryingly for Nintendo, such a delay, combined with a pronounced history of treating PAL regions with contempt, may undermine the traditionally fanatically loyal fanbase that Nintendo has always been able to count on in Europe.

While Nintendo's solid profit margins and high quality firstparty franchises may mean that the company can afford to be slightly complacent, the combination of Microsoft's entry into the home console market, rumours that Sony is to enter the handheld gaming market, and the relatively muted Japanese launch of GameCube, suggest that it might be wise for Nintendo not to further alienate its core fanbase. Condemning it to another era of delayed software and shoddy conversions certainly isn't the best start. A spokesperson for Nintendo was unavailable for comment as **Edge** went to press.







Despite the ubiquity of sore heads on the second day of X01, there remained a healthy level of interest in Xbox games

industryopinion

Edge asks the industry for its first impressions of Xbox

I was excited to be at Pierre Cardin's house overlooking the Côte d'Azur: complements to the Xbox staff. I thought the event was a great success (well the bits I remember when I was sober). It was an excellent opportunity for us to not only show off our products but also to hear valuable feedback. We were very pleased that we got awesome feedback for the three titles that we showcased (*Jet Set Radio Future*, *GunValkyrie* and *Sega GT*), especially *Jet Set Radio Future*. As for Xbox, it's great hardware. It has capabilities that many console developers have been hoping for and I reckon, given time, it will obtain a good share of the market in Europe – even though the European controller is a little too big for my hands! I'm looking forward to getting hold of a Japanese version. The representatives from Smilebit were very excited to be there to show everyone what they have been up to – they've been working very hard re-writing the code for *Jet Set Radio Future* so it takes full advantage of programmable shaders and a host of other features on the Xbox.

Kuniyo Matsumoto
Sega Europe

Having a big party and inviting the right people to ensure you make the papers and the airwaves over the following week may not be console marketing's equivalent of rocket science, but it's the kind of thing only Sony seems to have managed in recent years. As for the price, £300 seemed the only real option, despite the wait-and-see penny-pinching approach that most massmarket UK gamers take these days – Microsoft would surely have been stuffed for a meaningful Christmas 2002 price drop if they'd launched on a par with PS2. *DOA3* and *JSRF* were gorgeous and I can't wait to have a proper bash at *Halo*. It's nice to hear people talking about games when they launch a new console and, provided the right software arrives in time to alert people to the machine's unique strengths, it would be great to see them pull it off. True, the box could be prettier and its aesthetic is probably more appealing to the States than Europe, but I'm sure we'll get used to it. The real trick will be dealing with the fact that to the uninitiated, 'PlayStation' is synonymous with 'game console' like 'Hoover' is with 'vacuum cleaner'.

Pete Lyle
The Face

X01 was a significant event for Xbox in many ways. The reaction from the UK attendees has been extremely positive not only to Xbox and the games line-up, but also to the way the event was staged – spending time playing Xbox. The sense of excitement was infectious as people realised what Xbox can deliver. The feedback on people's favourites varied from *Rally Sport Championship* to *OddWorld*. For me the key games that stood out – apart from the addictive *Halo* and the astonishing *Dead or Alive 3* – were *Wreckless* and *Jet Set Radio Future*. What is even more exciting is knowing that Xbox has the potential to do so much more, a glimpse of which was seen in *Project Ego*. This is the start; the next step is to let gamers in the UK play Xbox. Roll on March 14th 2002.

Richard Teversham
Microsoft

The Cannes X01 event was the Xbox's first credible appearance. Having suffered at E3 for a variety of reasons, Microsoft showed an impressive ability to learn from and react to criticism. The event was controlled, well conceived and very, very cool. It is almost redundant to point out the considerable odds facing Microsoft. The PS2 has established a firm foothold in households across the world. The GameCube has a ready-made fanbase, and considerable credibility due to Nintendo's gaming history. The Xbox is ungainly and suffers from a questionable parentage: Microsoft is entirely lacking in street credibility. So what can the XBox offer? Well, a comparatively strong launch line-up and, frankly, a great attitude. *Halo* is a polished, dense, deep game play experience. *Dead Or Alive 3* shows evidence of the raw power of the console. *Munch* is a testament to Microsoft's willingness to go out on a limb. Where's the smug complacence? Where's the lacklustre, technically crippled first wave of software? But Microsoft still has some way to go. Its price-point disappointed those who forget the PS2's launch price. It's still large enough to be declared an independent state. The big Japanese developers seem yet to be convinced of its merits. Once a few well-known franchises start appearing on the platform, providing visual, comparative evidence of the machine's power, even the most ardent cynic should begin to see the behemoth's merits. At the very least, Microsoft's competitors should be receiving a wake-up call this season. And that can only be a good thing.

Dene Carter
Big Blue Box Studios

The Xbox line-up on show at Cannes is the strongest of any console launch I can remember. *Halo* and *Dead Or Alive 3* are the obvious headliners – both more than capable of driving system sales – but *Munch*, *Project Gotham* and *Jet Set Radio Future* are also enormously strong. *Wreckless* from Activision looks fantastic and *Rallisport Challenge* was a pleasant Euro-centric firstparty announcement. In all, I think the Xbox can look forward to an enormously successful launch period. It has at least four headline-grabbing, box-shifting triple-As, a solid range of competent sports and racing games and just enough on the horizon to keep gamers' enthusiasm high past month three – particularly the games offering creative use of the hard-drive such as Big Blue Box's *Project Ego* and Molyneux's *BC*. At 50% more expensive than the PlayStation2, the Xbox had to prove that its games were demonstrably better – after Cannes and the US launch I don't think this is any longer in doubt. The Xbox won't halt sales of the PS2 and I'm not sure it will even damage GameCube. However it will comfortably establish itself in the market in 2002. 2003 will be the year of the big showdown.

James Ashton-Tyler
Official Xbox Magazine



Bafta 2001 Awards

The 2001 BAFTA Interactive Awards usher in a better year for the videogames industry – but some nominations still proved too esoteric





The inaugural Amazon.co.uk Audience Award (top) was scooped by Eidos and *Championship Manager 00/01*. Mile Jacobson (top) from Sports Interactive collected the honours. Fittingly, the Games – Networked Award went to *Phantasy Star Online*. Kats Sato and Jim Pride from Sega Europe were on hand to receive the coveted BAFTA mask

Attended by the good and the great of the interactive entertainment industry, 2001's BAFTA Interactive Awards Ceremony, held on October 25 at the Grosvenor House hotel in London's West End, proved to be a carbon copy of last year's event.

After a solemn, yet thankfully brief introduction by David 'Lord' Puttnam, the rambunctious Phil Jupitus kickstarted events quite well with a short, vaguely gaming-themed set. Complaints about not receiving any free games after last year's BAFTAs amused, although by the fifth time of asking – which included announcing his home address to all and sundry – you couldn't help but wonder at his motivation for appearing. (And anyone who, by their own admission, has taken a claw hammer to an iMac clearly earns enough to buy his own software anyway.)

Sadly, once the first few award nominations and winners had been announced, the crowd gradually lost interest and the chatter level began to increase. By the final award, even Jupitus was struggling to be heard and looked happy to take his money and exit, stage left.

The nominations proved a strange concoction of videogames, CD-ROMs and curiously obscure Websites. Also, some of the categories were arbitrary in the extreme, most notably the Enhancement of Linear Media Award (effectively, the most interesting TV programme spin-off).

Even at £150 per nomination, some companies dutifully entered their properties for as many awards as possible, hence *Black & White* being up for the Moving Images, Games – PC, Music, Games – Networked, Interactivity and Technical Innovation Awards.

The nominations proved a strange concoction of videogames, CD-ROMs and curiously obscure Web sites. Also, some of the categories were arbitrary in the extreme

Naturally, some categories were more hotly contested than others. **Edge** was initially mystified why Sega's glorious shoot 'em up *Rez* failure to scoop the Interactive Arts Award, but on closer examination of the eventual winner (www.sodaplay.com) and the two other contestants (www.thebankoftime.com and www.technosphere.org.uk), we had to agree that it was, at least, a close run thing. And although **Edge** has no real complaints about the eventual winner of the Games – Console category (Polyphony's glorious *GT3*), we would still liked to have seen some variety in the nominations, which consisted mainly of generic crowd-pleasers.



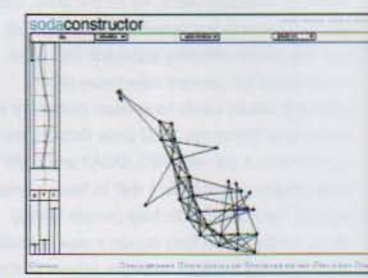
David Puttnam graced the event – now in its fifth year – with his Lordly presence

Thankfully, unlike last year's debacle, most of the eventual winners were more or less deserved. Questions remain, however, over the nominating wisdom of bundling videogames with CD-ROMs, Web sites and even interactive TV channels (or, as is the case with the Technical Innovation Award, a robot dog, mobile phone vector audio system and Digimask's 3D face-mapping technology). It would make more sense to split such entrants into tighter categories... Unfortunately, the thought of dragging out an already overly long ceremony even further remains an unpleasant one. This year's event may have been Webcast, but you certainly wouldn't want to have had it televised.

BAFTA WINNERS

Category	Winner	Company
Childrens	*Disney's Tigger's Honey Hunt*	Doki Denki/Disney Interactive
Enhancement of Linear Media	Walking with Beasts	BBC Science Online
Entertainment Web site	Tiny Planets	Peppers Ghost/Sesame Workshop
Factual	Marconi Online Museum	Wheel Ltd/Marconi
Games Console	*Gran Turismo 3*	SCEE/Polyphony Digital
Games Mobile	*Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2*	Neversoft/Activision
Games Networked	*Phantasy Star Online*	Sonicteam/Sega
Games PC	*Max Payne*	Remedy/Take 2 Interactive
Interactive Arts	Sodaplay	Soda Creative Technologies
Interactivity	*Black & White*	Lionhead Studios/Electronic Arts
Interface Design	Eyes Only	Less Rain
Lifestyle & Leisure	*Frequency*	Harmonix/SCEA
Learning	Immaterial Bodies	The Labyrinth Project
Moving Images	*Black & White*	Lionhead Studios/Electronic Arts
Music	*Shogun Total War*	Creative Assembly/EA & Dreamtime
News	BBC News Online	BBC News
Online Learning	Grid Club	Channel 4 Learning
Sound	*Conker's Bad Fur Day*	THQ/Rare
Sports	*ISS Pro Evolution 2*	Konami
Technical Innovation	SSEYO KOAN Interactive Audio Platform	SSEYO





Although firmly biased in favour of *Rez* (left), Edge admits that the winner of the Interactive Arts Awards – Sodaplay's playful on-line physics engine – does hold some merit

Milia Game Developer Village returns

Once again, 30 independent developers get a chance to showcase their wares at the Interactive Content Marketplace in Cannes

Once again, independent videogame developers will get a chance to showcase their work at Milia 2002, The World's Interactive Content Marketplace for broadband Internet, interactive entertainment, wireless media and interactive television.

The event, which takes place at the Palais des Festivals in Cannes from February 4–8, will again feature the Game Developer Village, sponsored by AMD along with new additional backers, Biovirtuals, Discreet and Mathengine. **Edge** and French games magazine 'Joystick' will continue to be official media partners.

The Game Developer Village is aimed at giving some of the world's most talented new young games developers a platform to show their skills and ability to senior decision makers from across the world, with places available for 30 independent developers to demonstrate their work at Milia free of charge. With significant interest already being shown, potential applicants should check out www.milia.com for more information. A committee composed of the event sponsors and media partners will select the 30 leading applications.

"MILIA is about the development of interactive entertainment and content and its distribution across multiple delivery platforms," explained **Laurine Garaude**, executive director of MILIA. "Of course it is a commercial event, where key professionals do multi-territory deals, but content is MILIA's lifeblood and we believe that initiatives like the Game Developer Village are at the centre of our brief. Our desire to provide a platform for young talent has been applauded and supported by the industry."

Milia itself will once again be prefaced by the Think.Tank Summit, a two-day cross-sector conference on February 4 and 5, with the main exhibition opening on February 5.







Expect the usual raft of French publishers and wireless game developers at next year's Milia. And of course, the boozy nights of informal networking at the Martinez hotel bar

CUTTINGS

Online legal resources relaunched

Law firm Osborne Clarke has relaunched and redesigned its online legal resource aimed at the videogame industry. Originally launched in October 2000, Gamesbiz.net is aimed at providing a cost-effective and easy to use set of legal documents and advice for both publishers and developers. The redesigned site contains a series of enhanced features and new services, including a telephone help line, a business directory, and an interactive question tree to help locate the specific legal advice required. See www.gamesbiz.net for more information.

TV Games

After the demise of 'Bits', videogames are set to return to our TV screens. 'Thumb Bandits' is a new 15 episode series being shown on Friday nights on Channel 4 from November the 16th. The show will be hosted by the familiar faces of ex-'Bits' girl Aleks Krotoski, and 'Thumb Candy's Iain Lee (who is perhaps better known from the 11 O' Clock Show). There's even a rumour that *Manic Miner* legend, Matthew Smith, could put in an appearance as a celebrity reviewer. See www.channel4.com/thumbbandits for more information.

It's not what you know...

Before the arrival of GPRS and 3G bandwidths transform wireless gaming, Kuju Entertainment and Digital Bridges aim to make the most of current technology. The two companies have announced the launch of *Txtwar*, a massively multiplayer game aimed at capitalising on the enormous popularity of mobile phone text messaging. Aiming to become successful tribal leaders, players must recruit other tribe members, or join an existing tribe, with battles won or lost depending upon how many tribesmen join up at a given time and date.

Online ubiquity

Ubi Soft's online division has launched a new internet gaming portal. Visitors to www.ubi.com will find news and previews of UbiSoft titles, as well as forums, features and a matchmaking facility for the company's multiplayer titles. The company also plans to jump on the massively multiplayer bandwagon, with *Shadowbane* launched in the first half of 2002. The company has also announced a multifaceted marketing campaign for *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon*, which is out at the end of November, including an e-mail promotion. See www.ghostrecon.co.uk/ghostreconemailer.zip for more information.

Ion Storm Havok

Middleware provider Havok has agreed to provide its realtime physics technology for Ion Storm Austin's forthcoming *Deus Ex 2* and *Thief 3* titles. The company's physics engine will work alongside a modified Unreal engine in both titles, taking the total number of titles in development that feature Havok technology to over 40. The latest iteration of the software features fast character cloth, enhanced deformable object physics and a groundbreaking car dynamics tool for realtime changes.

Korean publisher takes on Europe

Following a strong showing at this year's ECTS, Korean publisher Phantagram has opened a branch office in Germany. The company will also be publishing an updated version of its hit PC title, *Kingdom under Fire Gold*, in advance of the release of *Kingdom under Fire 2* on Xbox. Out at the start of November, the title will include several new features, including a campaign editor and multiplayer support through the company's Wargate.net service. Other upcoming titles include *Shining Lore*, *Strident* and *Duality*. See www.phantagraminteractive.com.

Episodic dream

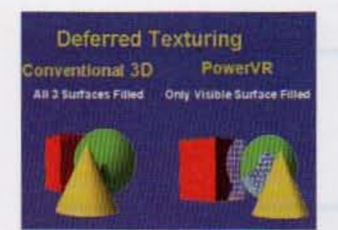
Quantic Dream, the French developer of *Nomad Soul*, has launched a new website to promote its forthcoming title, *Fahrenheit*. Making use of the company's ICE 3D engine, the title will be episodic, delivering new episodes each month. The web site can be found at www.fahrenheitgame.com.

Sensaura award

Audio middleware vendor, Sensaura, was awarded the 2001 MacRobert Award by HRH the Duke of Edinburgh on November 14. The prestigious award for innovation in engineering, given by the Royal Academy of Engineering, is for the company's 3D audio technology, which creates an illusion of 360 degree sound with just two conventional speakers or headphones.

Half-Life movie

In what is fast becoming a regular occurence, **Edge** can report that yet another videogame franchise is threatening to become a Hollywood blockbuster. After approaches from several filmmakers, Valve Software is canvassing opinion from fans whether it's a good idea to turn The Black Mesa Research Facility into a real life location. Interested parties should send opinions to movie@valvesoftware.com.





Imagination Technologies uses deferred texturing to provide faster rendering for its hardware. The company's hardware then renders by breaking a scene down into thousands of small tiles



Handheld power

Imagination Technologies' novel approach to rendering is opening up 3D possibilities for next generation mobile devices

David Harold, PR manager, Imagination Technologies







Despite the playground posturing many hardware vendors adopt on the subject of rendering technology, it's hard to imagine any rightminded gamer giving the subject a first, let alone second, thought. Rendering's just the process of drawing a 2D or 3D scene to a screen, right? Well, no, actually. For while North American giants such as Nvidia, ATI and Matrox all take a broadly similar approach, UK-based Imagination Technologies takes the rendering road less travelled.

"Instead of processing a complete 3D world and drawing and texturing objects which are hidden behind other objects, the first thing we do is divide the screen up into hundreds of 16 x 16 pixel tiles. We then work out what's visible in a tile, process the information, write it to the screen and then move on to the next tile. But we only draw the visible information, making it much more efficient," explains **David Harold**, Imagination Technologies' PR manager. With the pixel overdraw on games such as *Quake III* in the region of three (each pixel viewed has been drawn on top of two other pixels), the technology's potential becomes readily apparent. One market in particular will benefit…

PC-level PDA performance

"If you have a current generation Personal Digital Assistant (PDA), the processor can handle 2D reasonably well." Harold says. "However, because our technology involves low power consumption and takes up a small area of silicon, we can deliver 3D to a PDA of a level that people associate with a games console or PC. Not a new PC, but nevertheless a PC-level of performance."

Based on the same Series 3 core design used in STMicroelectronics' popular Kryo and Kryo II PC boards, this mobile device technology is known as PowerVR MBX (PowerVR is the graphics division of Imagination Technologies). "MBX comes in different scales," enthuses Harold. "There's a small version for mobile phones, a mid version for PDAs and entry-level set-top boxes, and a top version for more complex set-top boxes."



A non-interactive loop of *Tomb Raider* running at around 20fps demonstrated the PC game functionality of MBX, proving that the technology is capable of running highend PC content

Strong ARM tactics

Unlike the mix and match approach prevalent in PC circles, the demands of these devices means MBX is only available as an integrated System On Chip design combined either with an ARM 8 or 9 processor. "MBX is licensed through ARM," explains Harold. "It makes sense as pretty much everyone in the mobile market is an existing ARM customer." Customers end up with a single integrated chip containing the microprocessor, MBX and unified memory.

Imagination Technologies even offers an additional MBX module that offloads the Transform and Lighting (T&L) calculations from the main processor – something not yet supported in the Kryo range. "Performance is about ensuring there's a good distribution of where the work is being done in a system," Harold says, refuting the idea that a separate T&L chip for mobile device could be seen as overkill. "The big issue is how you distribute the work that needs to be done within your architecture. Having a co-processor taking some of that work away from the CPU is important."

However, gearheads will find it unwise to get too excited just yet. Although the technology is now available to be licensed, the length of time it takes to develop PDAs and next gen mobile phones means manufacturers are unlikely to be shipping MBX-enabled devices before the end of 2002.

URL www.imgtec.com & www.pvrdev.com

Ghost of the machine

As a chip technology, the PowerVR MBX doesn't exist on its own, but as a component combined with an ARM processor. For demonstration purposes, therefore, Imagination Technologies uses an experimental setup which emulates its performance. This runs various technology demos, showcasing the device's full screen anti-aliasing, level of depth complexity and use of the additional hardware T&L component, as well as an non-interactive loop of *Tomb Raider* (to prove MBX is capable of running highend PC content). This and the other demos currently run at between 15 and 25fps. The goal is to get the system running at a sustained level of 30fps on a 320 x 240 screen with full anti-aliasing. The emulation ran at an equivalent clockspeed of 15MHz, while depending on exact configuration, MBX chips will operate between 50 and 80MHz.



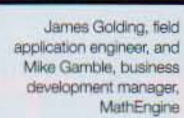


Even simple scenes in games such as *Quake III* involve significant pixel overdraw which causes performance slowdown. The right-hand shot shows its ability to draw transparency



Karma take root

MathEngine's physics solution is gaining momentum thanks to integration with Epic's Unreal Warfare





James Golding, field application engineer, and Mike Gamble, business development manager, MathEngine

The coming together of MathEngine's physics engine, Karma, with Epic Game's game engine, Unreal Warfare, is a cautionary tale for those who question the importance of trade shows. "At the Games Developer Conference we showed a firstperson shooter demo called *Revolver*, which was based on the Quake engine and viewer," says MathEngine's business developer manager **Mike Gamble**. "You might have thought id would have expressed some interest as it used the Quake engine but instead it caught the eye of some of the Epic guys. We met up with them at E3 and decided to make sure both engines worked well together. Epic has been very proactive: it's as committed as MathEngine to getting Karma and Unreal to work together." The first public showing of the resulting integrated packages followed at ECTS.

And more than just making for good publicity, the deal also seems to mark a turning point in MathEngine's fortunes. As is the case with much middleware, while developers have shown polite interest in physics engines, the concept hasn't proved itself outside of obvious applications such as vehicle dynamics. Essentially this was because developers needed to understand its potential from within their game engines, not via abstract falling block technology demos.

"Integrating the code into Unreal is relatively easy," agrees **James Golding**, MathEngine's field application engineer, who as well as integrating Karma with Unreal is the creator of the original *Revolver* demo. "What's more difficult is doing it in such a way that it's simple to use because Epic wants Unreal to be an artist-driven engine." Two weeks working at Epic's North Carolina HQ has ensured the process is well underway, however.

"It was interesting to see what tools animators were using to set up their inverse kinematic movement," Golding says. "We are intending to work closely with them over the toolchain, as the tools for setting up the physics of a skeleton look a lot like the tools for setting up the animation of a skeleton. For example, if you are working on a military-style game, you'll want to set the physical parameters so a character drops when you shoot it. Other games require a more cinematic John Woo-approach where movements are much more pronounced."

For this reason, the physical constraints affecting game characters and vehicles are exposed from within the game engine, allowing artists and level designers to tweak parameters such as joint friction, damping, engine torque and suspension in realtime. "The idea is the Karma engine will be open to the Unreal scripting language, which is dead easy to extend, so we can hook up and trigger events," Golding enthuses. "For example, if two objects collide, you can trigger different sound and particle effects depending on the velocity."

Using Karma means artists don't need to create animations for their models but instead can rely on inbuilt characteristics and let gravity and the gamer do the rest.

"We have technologies for cloth, smoke and fluids that have never been included in the core of the toolkit, because you never get them to a generic enough solution," Mike Gamble adds. "Working with a specific engine like Unreal means that we can start to include these features because the nature of the engine is tied down."

URL www.mathengine.com
URL http://udn.epicgames.com/







The integration between Karma and the Unreal Warfare engine was shown to Unreal licensees using this Cliff Bleszinski-designed level. Vehicle dynamics are a key area for the Epic team





MathEngine will ensure it provides artists with the tools that allow them to easily define the physical properties of character skeletons from within the Unreal engine

Unreal Karma

Soon to be in a game near you, Unreal is the most widely licensed firstperson engine, so MathEngine has been quick to show the numerous studios using it the benefits Karma can bring to their games. James Golding demoed a Cliff Bleszinski-created level which included *Unreal Warfare* characters and vehicles at the recent Unreal licensees event. As a result, MathEngine is in talks with several developers concerning the possibilities of using Karma. Epic is using the technology itself for the forthcoming *Unreal Warfare* game and it's also expected that Legend and Digital Extremes will use some Karma functionality in *Unreal 2* and *Unreal Championship* respectively.

"Games such as *Unreal Championship* will be using Karma for ragdoll and vehicles dynamics and some scenery stuff but not for core gameplay because the gameplay isn't about manipulating objects," says Golding. "But we have been talking to developers who are interested in doing things like laying traps and making barricades. In a couple of weeks we will start getting feedback from some of the Unreal licensees and that will be great because we'll start to get an idea of exactly what developers are going to do with it."

OUT THERE
REPORTAGE


Depending on demand, *Gran Turismo-Concept* may just be the first in a series of add-on supplements


Concept cars aren't necessarily faster than their conventional counterparts, so speed freaks beware


18 additional vehicles are included, as well as five supplemental courses to flesh out *GT3: A-spec*


Edge awaits the proposed '80s add-on, but would really be more interested in *Gran Turismo-Essex*



Freeland fans who have their appetites whetted by *Rez* should try and catch one of his sets on tour


The epic strains of 'Fear' are as majestically imposing as the superstylish visuals of Miziguchi-san's *Rez*

01 Conceptually yours

Japan: To coincide with the prestigious biennial Tokyo Motor Show, SCEI has announced the first add-on disc for *Gran Turismo 3: A-spec*. Originally called *Gran Turismo 3: B-spec*, but now renamed as *Gran Turismo-Concept*, the disc features eight prototype car models featured at the Motor Show, as well as ten models culled from the upcoming catalogues of Japanese automobile manufacturers, and five new courses. Kazunori Yamauchi has also hinted at the possibility of further themed add-ons, focusing on a single manufacturer, or automobiles from the '80s for example. Set for release in Japan at the start of next year, unfortunately *GT-Concept* doesn't look set to appear in Europe or the US. Which is a shame, because that probably rules out the possibility of an Essex-themed follow up disc, complete with bespoilered Escorts, blacked out windows, souped up sound systems, and Chelmsford high street cruising grounds.

02 Fear on tour

UK: Having provided the inspirationally epic 'Fear' to the soundtrack of *Rez*, **Adam Freeland**'s not resting on his laurels. For those who can't wait to sample the synaesthetic delights of Tetsuya Mizuguchi's masterpiece (reviewed p74) it might be worth checking out the Brighton-based DJ on his forthcoming tours of Australia, Europe, Japan and the US, or his new 'On tour' mix album. "I really liked the concept of having the music get better as you play better," explains Freeland of his collaboration. "I played the creators of the game various ideas I am working on for my artist album and they liked 'Fear' the best. I'm not a big videogame player, but I'm definitely gonna get a console to play *Rez*. It's beautiful." 'Fear' will be available on Freeland's forthcoming artist album next year. For more information check out www.marineparade.net.

Soundbytes

"Sony Music hates Sony Computer [Entertainment]"
PaRappa creator Masaya Matsuura kicks and punches the corporate line when asked why the *PaRappa The Rapper 2* soundtrack is published through Tommy Boy rather than in-house

"I realize that this announcement is a difficult one for many people to swallow, and I sincerely apologise. While I cannot detail all of the reasons that led up to this decision, I can tell you that it was made with the long-term interests of Sega fans in mind. Although the company may be changing – we are still Sega."
Sega of America's Peter Moore apologises after the announcement that *Shenmue II* won't be appearing on US Dreamcasts

"During the Cold War, American children played with spy toys like those on the television show 'Man from U.N.C.L.E.', and talked to each other on walkie-talkies. Today, they play videogames that allow them to blast away at terrorists."
America's abcnews.com comes over all 'Brass Eye'

03 Ball games

Japan: As reported in last month's JAMMA show report, Namco has developed a new gaming cabinet to woo gamers back into arcades. The O.R.B.S. or Over Reality Booster System offers gamers a 180-degree screen and 5.1 channel audio wrapped up in a sleekly spherical framework, in a bid to bolster the experience offered by titles like *StarBlade: Blue Planet* with which it was demonstrated. Here's hoping Namco's game balls don't go pear shaped.

04 Solutions to sweaty palms at hand

UK: Gamers with sweaty palms, blistered thumbs or calloused fingers must wait no longer for a solution to all their haptic hassles. Gecko Grip is a new accessory aimed at eliminating discomfort and imprecision, consisting of self-adhesive, non-slip grips that have been custom designed for use with videogame controllers. Currently only available for the Nintendo 64 and Game Boy Advance, plans are afoot to bring out versions for all next-generation consoles. The Gecko Grip is only available from www.geckogrip.net, at a cost of £2 for a pack of 17 pads, in five different colours.

05 Is that a gun in your pocket?

UK: In a move that looks set to shatter the productivity of the banking and advertising industries, Ideaworks3D has unveiled technology that enables networked 3D gaming content over Microsoft's Pocket PC 2002 platform. In conjunction with Eidos Interactive the company has already demonstrated a tech demo consisting of a version of the original *Tomb Raider* that is visually superior to the PlayStation version, and equipped with wireless network features. Though it's only been shown so far on Compaq's iPAQ, the likes of NEC and Toshiba will be releasing PDAs in early 2002 that will also support Ideaworks3D's Segundo technology.

Data Stream

Lycos Top 50 search engine ranking for Xbox at end of October: **29**

Lycos Top 50 search engine ranking for PS2 at end of October: **39**

Lycos Top 50 search engine ranking for GameCube at end of October: **59**

Box office revenues for opening weekend of Pixar's 'Monsters Inc.': **$62.5 million (£42.7m)**

Amount Steve Jobs paid George Lucas for Pixar in 1986: **$10 million (£6.8)**

Amount Steve Jobs' holding in Pixar was worth at flotation in 1995: **$1.5 billion (£1bn)**

Amount Nintendo is charging US retailers for demo GameCubes, according to Toys 'R' Us employee: **$2000 (£1,368)**

Amount Sony and Microsoft charge US retailers for demo units: **$0**

Latest version of *Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn*: **2.5.26498**

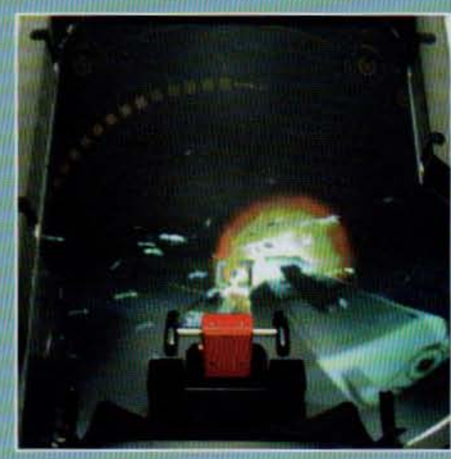
Size of team working on SCEE's *The Getaway*: **50**

Number of reference photographs taken for *The Getaway*: **30,000**

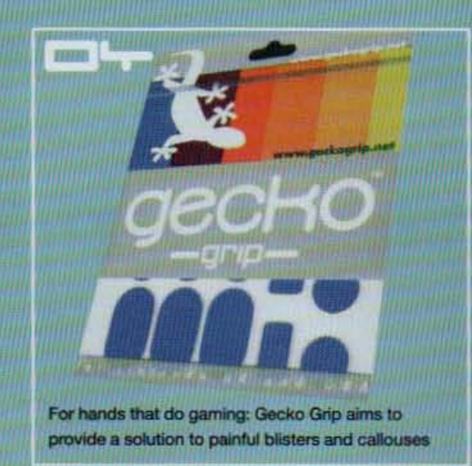
Hours of reference video footage filmed for *The Getaway*: **40**







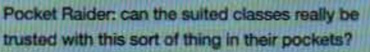




For hands that do gaming: Gecko Grip aims to provide a solution to painful blisters and callouses



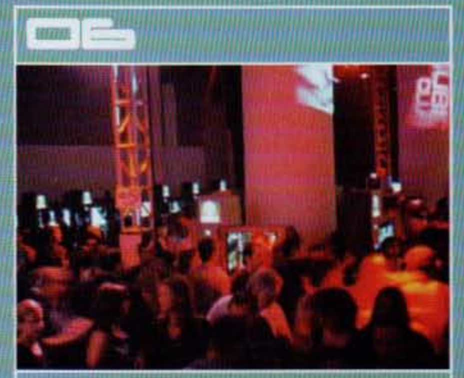




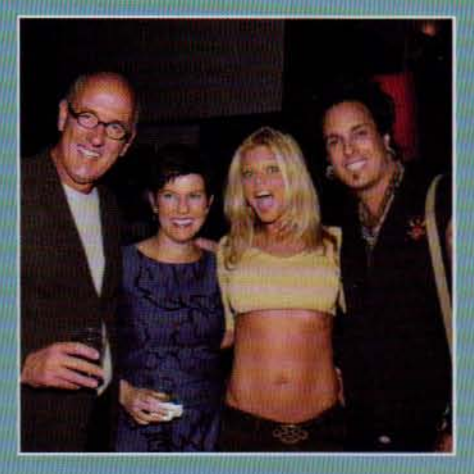
Pocket Raider: can the suited classes really be trusted with this sort of thing in their pockets?

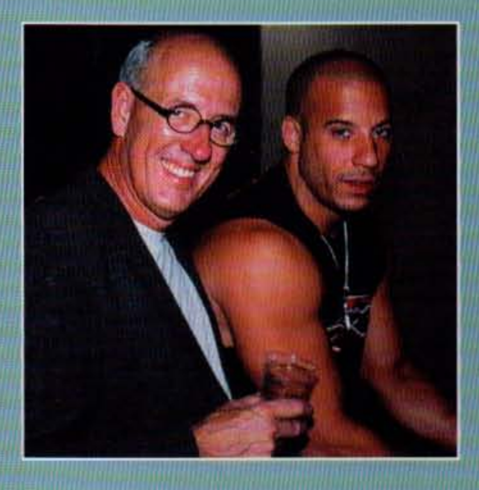


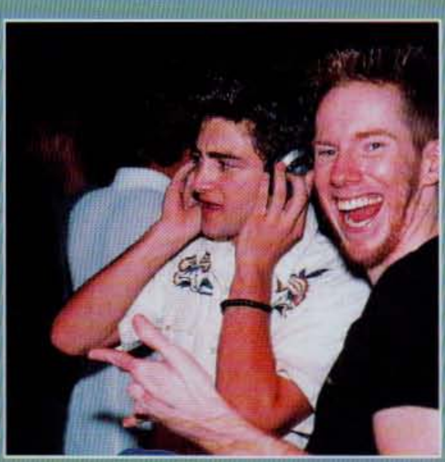
The PocketPC version of *Tomb Raider* features partially touchscreen controls and connectivity



B-list freeloaders mingled with A-list liggers to get a piece of the GameCube action prior to its launch







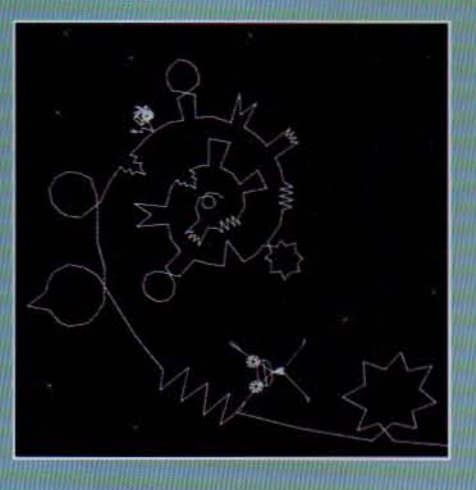


Good old *Galaga* updated with 20-inch monitor and walnut cabinet. Matthew Broderick not included





Bunny hops and wireframe beauty – Vibri bounces into the spotlight again for some rhythm action



06 Celebrity Cubes

US: In advance of the GameCube's November 18 US launch, Nintendo recently commenced a 12-city tour to drum up excitement. The MTV-cosponsored launch event, which took place in Los Angeles, attracted a raft of celebs to check out Nintendo's new system. Leonardo 'Titanic' DiCaprio, Kirsten Dunst ('Bring It On'), Tobey Maguire ('Spider-Man: The Movie'), Mötley Crüe bassist Nikki Sixx and wife Donna D'Errico, rap icon LL Cool J, Tara Reid ('Josie and the Pussycats'), Marlon Wayans ('Scary Movie'), and 'N Sync's Joey Fatone all turned out. But the question is, as the tour sweeps across the US, will it convince punters that GameCube isn't a toy?

07 American classics

UK: Like Proust's Madeleine, the very sight of an old arcade cabinet can bring back potent childhood memories: smoky rooms, the smell of chips, the weird sound the Atomic Piles made in *Moon Cresta*. But old monitors and unreliable components do little to encourage the collection of these gems. Enter www.arcadeaddicts.com with its latest range of American Classics tables. With a variety of panel finishes, all new parts and a range of Jamma boards, including *Pac-Man*, *Galaga*, *Scramble*, *1942* and *Donkey Kong*, the joys of retro gaming can be brought to your home or business. Contact Arcade Addicts on 0208 366 7152 for prices and more information.

08 Vibri book

Japan: Paying videogame characters to do their thing is all very well, but it's nice when we get a glimpse behind the magic. All hail NanaOn-Sha, *PaRappa* creators and authors of a 150-page book detailing the daily routine of Vibri, the wireframe rabbit star of *Vib Ribbon*. The existential moment where Vibri plays *Vib Ribbon* is a cute touch, but perhaps a bit *too* obvious; the apparent encounter with a fruit laced with mind-expanding hallucinogens and subsequent explosion of colour is a little less predictable. If that's not enough, two corners of the book serve as 3D flick-book movies, making it the perfect Christmas gift for the rhythm action fan in your life.



Thumb Bandits
Here's hoping Matthew Smith turns game reviewer

Edge's furniture catalogue fame
Littlewoods catalogue photographer in good taste shocker

Interoffice *Halo* competition
Edge flexes digital muscles over the Future LAN



Marginalisation of videogames in mainstream media
'Thumb Bandits' aside, of course

Rumoured GameCube delay
How much longer will Europe be a gaming pariah?

Dead Sea Monkeys
Edge experiment goes tragically wrong



09 Jobs for the boys

Steve Jobs: CEO of Apple Computer Inc. (twice), CEO of Pixar, creative visionary, arrogant genius, petulant bully. The many faces of Jobs are revealed in Deutschman's authoritative and incisive biography, which presents a man whose charisma has reached well-documented 'reality distorting' levels; a man who is reviled and adored in equal measure, often by the same people.

The rise, fall and rise of Steve Jobs is the stuff of legend. The early days of Jobs as hippy and precocious Silicon Valley entrepreneur have been covered in detail elsewhere, so Deutschman begins the story after Jobs has been ousted from Apple, taking with him his millions of dollars in "fuck-you" money. The tale relates the startup and eventual decline of of NeXT Computer, Job's fortuitous purchase of Pixar from George Lucas (for just $10 million), his dealings with Disney over *Toy Story*, and his eventual return to Apple as instigator of the iMac and, undoubtedly, saviour of the company.

Through it all, the author utilises a wealth of quotable sources, people close to Jobs who were involved in many aspects of his business and private life. We learn of Jobs' almost split personality; an amazing generosity combined with a ferocious management style that has reduced many employees to tears. The friends who stuck with him through thick and thin, but were driven away by Jobs' maddeningly mercurial ways.

Though any biography of the man must by necessity be done at arms' length (Jobs is notoriously private, though happy to manipulate the media to his own ends) Deutschman has, seemingly, uncovered almost every piece of evidence against him. Damning though this is, it's presented in the context of a man who started life as an outcast, who only met his natural parents and sister late in life, and who is driven by an awful desire to succeed and to warrant the acclaim of his peers. It is a fascinating real-life drama, and a thoroughly rivetting read.

10 Ultimate history

Steven L. Kent's *The First Quarter*, originally published last year, rapidly met widespread approval from the videogame community. With the tome quickly establishing itself as the most comprehensively detailed chronicle of the first 25 years of electronic gaming, it's just a shame that it consequently became exceedingly difficult to locate a copy. Enter Prima Publishing with a comprehensive reprint, a new title, 100 more pages (including a new, more contemporary final chapter), a timeline, a black and white photo gallery, and a meticulous erratum.

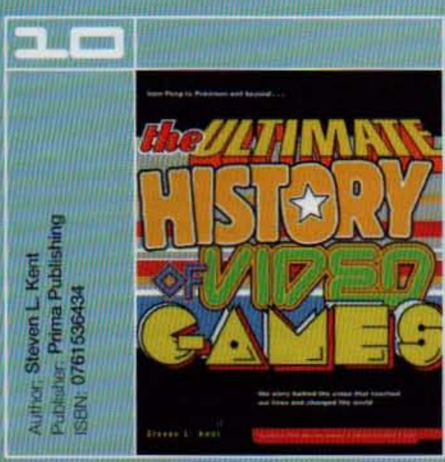
It still proves fascinating to read, and the characteristically entertaining anecdotes and recollections of some of the most influential players in the history of the videogame industry still prove timely and relevant. Readers who have yet to be convinced should check out an exclusive excerpt from *The First Quarter* in **E**93, but the simple truth is this; you should buy this book, and savour it.

Joytech Apology

In issue 104 **Edge** featured an article about the Joytech Design Challenge under the incorrect heading 'Logitech Design competition'. **Edge** would like to apologise to Joytech for any confusion this may have caused.



Author: **Alan Deutschman**
Publisher: **Broadway**
ISBN: **0767904338**



Author: **Steven L. Kent**
Publisher: **Prima Publishing**
ISBN: **0761536434**



Site: **Habbo**
URL: **www.habbo.com**

11 Web site of the month

Habbo is an avatar-based chatroom set in a virtual hotel. It's also home to **Edge**'s (somewhat older) forum community, or at least tiny facsimiles of them, handfuls of whom log on in the late evenings to live it up at Habbo's Club Massiva. But when the regulars aren't dancing it up with tarty 16-year-olds, they're in **Edge**'s private room, kindly furnished by generous visitors. Complete with en-suite bath, a TARDIS-like phone box, and a working spin-the-bottle game, it's open to anyone who knows the name and the password. Both can be found at the **Edge** forum, at http://www.futureforums.co.uk/edge.



12 Advertainment

Japan: In a memorable (and amusing) move, Bandai's *Zeonic Front* television ad campaign makes reference to the three legendary Zion robot enemies of the original 1978 Gundam series – the *Three Black Knights* – which hero Amuro Ray must confront alone (albeit from within the relative safety of his Gundam).

01 Voiceover: "PlayStation2" 02-03 "Hmmm?" 04 "What the...?" 05 "One Black Knight." 06-07 "Two... no, three Black Knights?" 08 "That's it..." 09 "...I will not let you paaaaaaaaaaaaass!" 10-12 Voiceover: "Let yourself be immersed and engage in some Gundam destruction within an ultra-realistic depiction of the Gundam world." 13 (Inane chatting.) 14 "Aaarrghh..."

It's not big, and it's not clever, but… fuck. Somewhere, somehow, there's a fly in the room. RedEye stops and listens, paces round the room, tries to find it. There's a pause, a rattle, another pause – and he tracks it down to where the fly's trapped, tumbling around between RedEye's beige window blinds and a glass-fronted frieze of a city caught in a cold snap. It's dizzy, drunk on thoughts of summer. But it's the middle of November, and RedEye has just arrived back from a morning of Christmas shopping. Outside is sharp, breath-taking, all thin air and ice-coloured skies. RedEye had the sense to turn the central heating on to full before he left, and that's why the fly thinks that it's summer; that's why it's awake. Little miracles: isn't biology wonderful? Now… let's kill it.

As mentioned, RedEye spent the morning Christmas shopping, trying to find gifts for non-gamers. Which means, essentially, spending a morning wandering dazed round an alien planet where there's some value in shrink-wrapped shaving sets and miscellaneous perfumed plastic add-ons for cars, and an afternoon panic-buying into culture subsets he finds incomprehensible. Still, RedEye's nephews never go hungry for electronic entertainment at Christmas; the end of the afternoon takes him to an indie videogame store. And he's loitering by the PS2 section when he catches the tail end of this conversation.

Girl: "…thinking about Xbox?"

Assistant: "Well, no. You shouldn't."

Girl: "Uhm. Okay."

Assistant: "It's rubbish. There've been reports of it crashing all over the US. They're all bugged. Better with a PS2. Or wait for a GameCube. More of a girl's machine. Cuter handles."

Girl: "But I read that…"

Assistant: "Ahaha. No, really, trust me. Microsoft suck."

Handles. And the guy keeps spewing ill-informed garbage in a patronising tone – he comes *this* close to touching her shoulder – and RedEye seethes, and… hold on. The fly's still alive. Fuck.

Swearing's not big or clever, but neither's perpetuating the view of videogame fans as a nerdy, know-all, male-dominated clique. RedEye's Xbox, on the other hand… well, that's *quite* big, although not nearly as big as some would have you believe, and it's definitely clever. *Halo*, *Amped*, and *Project Gotham* prove that much, but the whiny Microsoft-hating adolescents aren't going to accept it. They want a world where Nintendo design operating systems that only boots up if you're on first name terms with Shigeru. Wouldn't it be good if the Xbox provided a fresh start; one that doesn't come with all the sexist, in-joke, careless misogyny of the videogame community?

Maybe it will. There's a real chance that Microsoft will bring a new demographic to gaming. Its brand name's strong enough to get non-gamers interested, and the stodgy, substantial presence of the Xbox casing ought to be enough to attract the Dixons black-box crowd. They gave an indication of conceivable intentions by signing the Oddworld franchise, a series whose previous iterations were declared by urban legend to be the Girl Gamer's Girl Game, but then blew it with *DOA3*. As an editorial on GameGirlz.com put it, "Where are the sexy men with g-strings and bulging, bouncy groins?" Good question. RedEye's often wondered it himself. Kidding. Maybe.

The stoic, unchangeable, immature fanboy community is videogaming's cancer. It touches us all, and it retards our development, changes us for the worse. RedEye has a friend called K, whose real name is Karen, but no-one online – not even those in her *Counter-Strike* clan – knows that. When people ask what the K stands for, she shrugs and grins and tells them Killer, or Kickass, or Kevin, or Ketamine, or whatever – never Karen. She tried it once, and when you ask what happened, she just shrugs and blahs like she knew what'd happen, and that it's not worth talking about. Whatever; she never tried it again. Why bother? The only place she's played as a girl online was *Phantasy Star*, and she doesn't play that any more. Not since the cheating started, since the boys got to the heart of Ragol too. There's no point.

Anyway, perhaps things are changing. RedEye's just calming down, queuing at the checkout, and notices the scene in front. A couple of teenage girls and a middle-aged woman are trading a handful of games in for a copy *Final Fantasy IX*.

"Yeah," says the teenage assistant casually, making his play. "This is pretty good". The girl checks him out, but she's not interested. She looks at the floor, kicks her feet. "Oh, good…"

"I liked *Final Fantasy VIII*," says the Mother figure. The daughter blushes, glares.

"Mum…"

"I liked it!"

"Mum, it's…"

"What? I liked it!"

"Never mind."

It's like the mother's just confessed to liking pop music. It's like she's singing Britney. It's like games are *normal*.

RedEye closes with a snapshot. A friend of a friend is picking at the bones of a dead relationship. It's not the first to fail; she has very strict criteria – she's young, she can afford to – but those criteria aren't typical. He must be pretty, he must be her intellectual equal, and he must also know his way through *Baldur's Gate*. Despite having a fair grounding in RPGs, her most recent attempt had much too much geek and not nearly enough chic.



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Male dominance: cursing the XX chromosoners

Swearing's not big or clever, but neither's perpetuating the view of videogame fans as a nerdy, know-all, male-dominated clique

"Oh well," she sighs, "I did meet a cute friend of his called Lee. Plays *Ultima* and has nice blue eyes. But I'm very fickle."

More power to her. She, K, and the *Final Fantasy* girls are flicked away with the back of the hand by an industry that's institutionally misogynistic, an industry whose imbecilic children reject the Xbox without experiencing it. Go online, and you'll hear the Internet's background soundtrack, the same fuzzed-up whine of undersexed teens and masturbating 20-somethings, buzzing round, making the same old whiny noise, confused by the changing climate. I hate Microsoft, I love breasts. Isn't biology wonderful? RedEye flips the window open and flicks the fly outside. Fxxk them. Fxxk them all.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

Picture your columnist sat at home in a grimy, ripped T-shirt and camouflage trousers, cigar clenched between his teeth, shouting "Come on!" at the TV screen while blasting merry hell out of *Time Crisis 2* with the shotgun shells. A disturbing image, to be sure, but it does illustrate the basic attraction of the videogame form: *power*.

No doubt some **Edge** readers are besuited, staff-rationalising CEOs of large corporations, or perhaps members of the European Parliament, but the truth is that most of us don't have much power in our daily lives, and videogames offer to remedy that situation for us. Which is why claiming that a game like *Time Crisis 2* is simply "escapism" isn't telling the whole story. The notion of escapism implies a simple desire for removal from one's immediate surroundings, without any preference as to the destination. But a game that landed us in an even more tedious and impotent role than we enjoy in our real lives wouldn't be much fun. A game should make us feel more important, not less. It should give us more power.

Power, of course, has many masks. When Nietzsche declared that a "will to power", rather than a namby-pamby will to continue existing, was the driving force behind all living things, he didn't mean that your average amoeba dreamed secretly of becoming a Napoleon among amoebae, of invading the next rock with its single-celled army and eventually bending the entire pond to its stern, jelly-like will. For an amoeba, power is exerted simply through a constant battle with its environment.

Similarly, when playing games, we humans do not necessarily have to exert power through the miming of violent acts. The surge of power through one's veins when one has calculated a forced win in chess is one of the most brutally enjoyable there is, even though one's own actions – shuffling carved bits of wood around – are on the surface entirely innocuous. And although admittedly our enjoyment of *Time Crisis 2* would be diminished if we were just shooting cardboard targets, there would still be some measure of power left: the power to engage with a system on its own terms and beat it hands down. The game then constructs a rhythm of available force, occasionally offering us a machine gun for a surge of destructive pleasure – just as with the power-ups in *R-Type*, or the three-stage assembly of your rocket in *Moon Cresta*.

Less obviously, violent videogames can offer greater and more subtle varieties of power to play with. There is, for example, the simple power of ordering a character about – being able to make a 'subserviant' Mario or Lara do exactly what you want, and having your inputs amplified in beautiful, complex onscreen animations. And then there's the power that accrues to one who has greater knowledge than his enemy, which is the principle behind stealth action, from *Thief* to *Headhunter*. Or the intellectual power of being able to solve crafty problems set for you by the game designers, exemplified by the gorgeously logical *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*. God games, meanwhile, create their own overarching pseudo-narrative entirely out of the gradual acquisition and proper dispensation of power.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Power: and what videogames will do to provide it

But power is nothing without control. A hoary old car-ad cliche, but still true. *Metal Gear Solid 2* exemplifies this organic interconnection by exploiting the analogue interface to enable a differentiation between stealthy, silent movement and all-out action. All too often, though, videogames are frustrating when they limit your power in inconsistent ways.

Such flaws can be no less annoying for being subtle. *Ico*, for example, is in many ways a laudably beautiful and thoughtful game, but the fact it doesn't offer the player a first-person lookaround function is a serious omission. This is, after all, a game that's predicated on the user's acquisition of power over her environment: a gradual ability to negotiate and exploit its lovely and complex spaces. But acquiring a mental map of *Ico*'s huge, multilevel rooms is more problematic than it should be. Sure, the right stick moves the camera, but it moves it from a strange, disorientating oblique position, and your field of view is pointlessly limited. (Do we really need to go back and tell the character to rotate his body around some more so we can look where we want to?) This is an issue of power, rather than a simple control glitch, because it fails adequately to represent the near-automatic freedom to look around that we experience in real life. If knowledge is power, this fault in the game works to limit the knowledge we can easily glean from our surroundings through vision.

Despite videogames' intellectual complexity, the varieties of power offered to us by them are still, basically, mechanical. We express power by doing things to the environment, or doing things to other characters. What videogames have been unable as yet to reproduce is the variety of power that is so addictive to many people in real life: the power of psychological manipulation. Books on this topic have been a surefire winner ever since the publication of Dale Carnegie's 'How to Win Friends and Influence People', and we all know at least one person who, fascinated by office politics, takes great pleasure in developing micro-strategies – "own the silence" is the preferred maxim of one man I know – to climb the greasy pole.

Despite videogames' intellectual complexity, the varieties of power offered to us by them are still, basically, mechanical

A swift bout of digital ultraviolence can be all the more refreshing if we're no good at this real-life game, but it's an evanescent consolation. On the other hand, if videogames ever develop the ability to simulate this kind of personal and political interaction, might we hope that one day the power-hungry will be sated by the varieties of virtual machiavellianism on offer, and that we could even be ruled by people who actually want to make the world a better place, rather than simply wanting to spray their egos over as many unwilling citizens as possible? Nice dream. For the moment, I'll take the comforting certainties of the shotgun.

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

Yesterday, I was watching TV and I found this very interesting interview of Mr Sugiyama Koichi. He is very well known as the *Dragon Quest* theme composer. He has also been the director of numerous popular TV programs. Well, as I said he is a very famous man in Japan. I chose his interview for my column this month as he said some very interesting points.

He spoke about "ability" and "effort". He explained that ability (or skill in a sense) and effort (the power which drives you) do not come together as an addition but through synergy (multiplication). That means that if you have great abilities but don't want to spend much effort, the result is zero: 100 x 0 = 0. In the opposite way, even if you deploy a lot of effort but have no particular abilities, the result would be the same: 0 x 100 = 0.

This remark has remained deeply inside me since then. I mean these are very harsh words. They have such an impact, very different from the common thinking you hear like, "Anybody can succeed if he keeps going. Yes, keep trying!" Well it is up to everybody to prefer one or the other way of thinking but, I have to admit, Mr Sugiyama may be right after all.

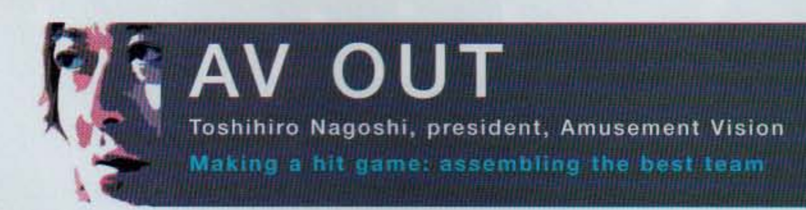
This is the first time I have heard of such a simple way to describe these two words, ability and effort. In more than 12 years in this industry, on many occasions – the bad ones – I have thought, "Do I really have the right abilities?" That's why his words had such an impact on me. I remember I had a similar approach years ago. In my case I was thinking about "Experience", "Material" (let's say knowledge) and "Technology". For me, "effort" is obvious so I do not take it into account. I mean, when you work in the games industry, if you do not spend effort on your work, as a pro, you are out the story. So let me explain my point of view here.

As Mr Sugiyama said, it is about synergy and not addition. When I joined the industry, I was told that simulation games (in this case something which recreates reality) should be done with people who have experience in the field of the thing you want to simulate. This thinking is still valid. People who have witnessed something, who saw it, tried it or heard it have this vital experience, which makes all the difference with people who didn't. Even if you consider unreal fields like fantasy, science fiction or war (obviously you don't go to a real battlefield in order to make a videogame), you can develop a form of experience through books, movies or comics. Yes, you can get a valuable knowledge, very useful. So here is my thinking: The best condition to make a game is when you gather the following conditions: you have a solid experience, you like the theme you are working on and you have a good level of technology.

When you have such people in your team, this has to deliver a great result. Our *Virtua Striker* team is one good illustration. Some played (or are still playing) soccer and know everything about the sport. Plus most of the team has more than 15 years of experience in game development. That helps us very much!

However this is not always the case. You look at everybody's experience, technology and knowledge, then you assign some to a project accordingly in order to get the best team for the job. But as you would understand, making the perfect team is not always possible.





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Making a hit game: assembling the best team

When you work in the games industry, if you do not spend effort on your work, as a pro, you are out of the story

Why so? Let's think a little while. In order to make a good team, you should base it on the three aspects I described before: knowledge, experience and technology. Now, you should start by putting a grade for each staff, one for each of the three aspects. Since we are speaking about synergy and not addition, first, you have to be sure there is no zero in your team so you get a result at the end of the process. This is important. But in reality, there should be no zero. I mean I don't know one single person who has no interest in something.

People who work in this industry are naturally curious about many things. Well they should be according to me. However, sometimes there are people who say things like, "I don't want to work on this kind of game. I would rather rather die than make it!" When I hear such things I'm always very surprised and I don't know what to say, I mean there is so much to do in many genres! It may be a problem of personality?

Anyway, let's get back to our problem. So rather than talking about "avoiding zero", let's say "level up" the weakest category. For example, if you have the knowledge and the technology but no experience, it would be great to allow the people in the team to gain this experience. In that way, their interest will develop as well as their experience.

Another example, if you have the knowledge and the experience but no technology, well you should train them. The last example, if you have the experience and the technology but no knowledge, you should arrange for them to be provided with it. However, if two categories are near zero, it would take too much time so this would be very difficult. Well, in that case you should put these kinds of people in projects they are interested in.

But before all, I think the most important thing is the value of person who will assign the staff to one project or another. His or her sense is crucial. If he has none, he would not be able to decide correctly. Of course, he wouldn't be able to fix each weakness. He would even be unable to detect any "zero". That would affect directly the staff's motivation and, consequently, the development.

Well if I had to put these grades on me I would say I'm in the 50 x 50 x 50 situation, taking 100 as the maximum. Now, I'm sure if I had to grade my "effort" as well, I would reach 10000 points! Yes, I'm a man with honest abilities and a strong effort capacity. When I work, I always put a lot of attention on the three aspects I spoke about. These are essential when making a big hit title. See you again.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4



Recruiting staff in the games industry is a dirty and imprecise science. Given that a development team's value is nothing more than the sum of its individual talents, the stakes are high. There are several well-worn methods, each of which offers different benefits to employer and potential employee alike. With over 60 employees, we've had chance to look at each of these in depth. Here's what we've discovered…

Recruitment consultants

Recruitment consultants are the most common source of new recruits. The back pages of **Edge** are full of adverts for the larger agencies, and most people in the industry use them at some stage or other. However, there are drawbacks to using them. They're expensive, typically charging 10-25% of the recruit's annual salary by way of a finder's fee. They also offer a mixed level of service. The excellence of some is more than matched by the mediocrity of others. Several act as nothing more than clearing houses for candidates, carpet-bombing development houses with mass mail-outs of bargain basement CVs. This helps no-one and calls for extensive use of the round metal file.

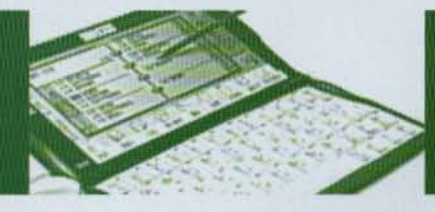
The work of recruitment consultants also extends to the murky world of poaching, a dirty business that causes a great deal of resentment among targeted companies. Important and senior positions are hard to fill, and occasionally head-hunters are called in to do the dirty work. Once again, this offers mixed results. The cost is astronomical (sometimes as much as 40% of the starting salary) and the results vary. We very rarely use head-hunters.

University graduates

One of our major sources of new recruits is university graduates. The increasing complexity of games, particularly with the advent of 3D, has created a need for programmers with high-powered academic training in science and maths. We take a lot of people from Cambridge every year, because we have excellent contacts there. There are also lots of excellent graduates from other universities and we take as many of them as we can, given the time to find them. Reaching them before the City does is a challenge, however. Persuading them to forego cash and spreadsheets for games, pizza and late nights isn't always as straightforward as you might think.

Everyone we've had has been excellent, and their enthusiasm often contrasts with the weary cynicism which often characterises those who have been in the industry for a long period of time. If any of you reading this are in your final year, please drop us a line.

That's not to say academic qualifications are enough in themselves. University can breed complacency and give people an unrealistic appraisal of their own self worth. Equally, a bad degree can be worse than not having a degree at all. I'm always underwhelmed by applicants who've got 2:2s – if you're going to arse around at university, at least do it properly and get a third. Or do it with style and flunk out completely. One of the programmers did just that, exchanging the thrills of an Economics Degree at LSE for careers as a boat-builder and session musician (complete with soft rock bubble perm). He's also an autodidact who made a living writing and selling his own games for five years. Qualifications can be as misleading as they can be helpful.



VIDEOGAME DIARY

Joe McDonagh, Designer, Elixir

Recruitment: somebody's gotta do it…

A bad degree can be worse than not having a degree at all. I'm always underwhelmed by applicants who've got 2:2s

Advertising

Advertising is an established, if expensive method of finding new staff. Turn to the back of **Edge** and you'll find pages of adverts. A full page ad will cost you around £2K, which is a lot of money, although still cheaper than using agencies. What it offers over the other methods is a means of getting people from outside the industry. Tuomas, one of our Lead Designers, previously worked as Head of Games Development at Games Workshop. It's unlikely that we would've been able to recruit him had we not advertised in **Edge**.

Word of mouth

Many people join us through personal recommendations from people who already work here. If a member of the team is prepared to go out on a limb for someone and vouch for him or her it usually means they're all right. Usually they've worked together before. I used to work with my current Producer in my first job at Ubi Soft, where he worked in the tech support department.

Finding prospective recruits is only half the battle, the other half being the interview process. I dislike interviews intensely, not least because I'm cynical about their efficacy as a means of ascertaining someone's qualities. I've done over 200 interviews since the start of Elixir and with all but the minority, you know within the first two minutes whether you like them or not. The sense of power over somebody's career is unpleasant, as is the very nature of the event, which is nothing more than an interrogation lurking beneath the veneer of a friendly chat. Having been on the receiving end of it myself when I was looking for a job, I try to palliate the experience by being blunt and up front. My apologies to those who have suffered from this approach. Nothing illustrates the inaccuracy of interviews more than the fact that one of our best programmers gave the worst interview I've ever seen. We took a chance on him and he's since repaid our faith too many times to count.

To finish off, here a selection of my favourite recruitment moments:

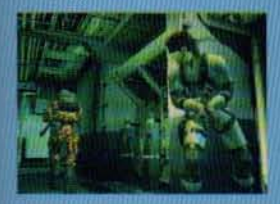
- The candidate that turned up to an interview in a skirt (we liked him).
- The artist whose portfolio included work by our Art Manager.
- The person who was approached by head-hunters to see if he was interested in doing his own job.

Joe McDonagh is a designer at Elixir Studios

Edge's most wanted

Metal Gear Solid 2

A chance to run through the game's first section proper reveals an unexpected twist. No spoilers here, though; you deserve to find this one out for yourself.



(PS2) Konami

GunValkyrie

Xbox received a boost from Smilebit at the X01 event in Cannes. It wasn't just the cel-shaded finery of *Jet Set Radio* that shone; *GunValkyrie* turned heads too.



(Xbox) Sega

Mario Sunshine

What's that strange device strapped to Mario's back? Jetpack? Flame-thrower? Vacuum cleaner? Knowing Nintendo, it might take until 2003 to discover the truth.



(GC) Nintendo

Guilty Gear X

The Dreamcast version was superb, and the imminent PS2 port looks just as spectacular. The return of the instant kill is eagerly anticipated.



(PS2) Virgin

Link's growing pains

Or how to establish a character

"Are you drunk?" asks one concerned *Zelda* fan of Shigeru Miyamoto on the Mature Zelda Petition Web page at www.onlinepetitions.com. It's not an isolated comment, sitting as it does beside some 9,000 others raging about the new cel-shaded Link. It's somewhat ironic that the individuals passionate enough to complain about the character's 'child-like' appearance can only use invective usually reserved for the school playground.

But why has there been such an outcry? The answer's simple: a certain section of the gaming community will always feel embarrassed playing a game which looks like a stylised Disney cartoon, no matter how impressive the gameplay. Youngsters and mature gamers will take Miyamoto-san's next Hyrule adventure on its own merits, but the flabby demographic at the centre will probably miss out on a treat. While it's unhealthy to judge a game before playable code is available, it would be a major surprise if the next *Zelda* title ended up as a limited platformer aimed at pre-teens.

But Miyamoto-san's decision to deliver a stylised Link has already established the character in the minds of gamers the world over. More so than previous iterations on NES, SNES and N64. If anything, it's a superb example of how to make a memorable character from a few simple curves and lines. Other developers going down the photorealism route have failed miserably to establish their characters in such an instant way. Who will remember Max Payne in a few years' time, even though the game has been a huge success?

Fact is, the most recognisable characters in videogame history are from the 8bit era when the technology couldn't handle beauty spots and wrinkles. Mario, Sonic, Yoshi, Monty Mole, Dizzy, Pac-Man, Horace... They all became iconic because of the limitations of technology. Game characters which have become popular recently have all focused on hyper-stylisation, rather than going for maximum detail. Core has noticeably kept Lara Croft's features exaggerated even though she's moved over to the PS2.

Psychologists have found strong evidence to suggest that neonates have an innate ability to recognise faces – big eyes, large smile, small nose – it's not that difficult. The new Link appeals to our primal instincts and 'cute' doesn't really do him justice. With the character now stamped in our consciousness, we can only hope that the game becomes as memorable.





030







Samurai

Acquire, the developer of *Tenchu*, has returned to feudal Japan for a story based on pride and passion. This time, however, there promises to be more action







The player will be expected to liberate the samurai hero from perilous situations. Perhaps the developers have been as much influenced by Buster Keaton films as those of Akira Kurosawa



The samurai theme will be conveyed through the use of cut-scenes using the game engine. Characters met during one game may behave differently in another depending on the route taken by the player



Samurai is from Acquire, the company which developed the excellent *Tenchu* series. Though the *Tenchu* titles suffered from some technical difficulties, such as scenery breaks and poor draw distance, the team behind the games delivered stealth elements which, in some respects, were superior to those experienced in *Metal Gear Solid*.

Greater freedom in the environments and imaginative devices, such as a grappling hook device and blow pipe, offered more choice and tense gameplay. These were the elements that attracted the growing Japanese publishing group, Spike Interactive to the talented development team.

The delightful stealth elements of the *Tenchu* series... will be replaced with elegant sword play and intense bouts of action

"Acquire is very famous for the *Tenchu* series and we thought its style was very interesting," Spike's media division director, **Mitsu Sakurai**, told **Edge**. "Its stoic design is very unique among Japanese developers. There has not been many new styles of games lately and it has been a common will between Spike and Acquire to make something original." The first design for *Samurai* was to produce a game with a comical bent with a tone more akin to Jackie Chan than Bruce Lee. But Acquire's familiarity with feudal Japan and the brutal aspects of an age-old honour system persuaded Spike to go with a game focusing on pride, drama, elegance and passion.

Samurai is the result of many discussions about the game's outlook but from fervent negotiations emerged a title with a single vision. Once an agreement was reached Acquire attacked the concept with gusto. "Samurai are very dynamic warriors," enthuses Acquire's CEO, **Takuma Endo**. "When I was developing ninja games, I understood that stealth play was essentially tactical. That means you kill your enemies without being detected. In *Tenchu*, I tried to make this aspect involve some action but this is nothing compared to *Samurai*. I have to admit, this project let us deliver the action part fully. It is one of my satisfactions with this project."

Those expecting the delightful stealth elements of the *Tenchu* series may be disappointed, though these will be replaced with elegant sword play and intense bouts of action. Acquire expect to challenge the player with up to ten opponents at one time. A swift and intuitive control system should give players the opportunity to dispatch enemies in quick succession, mimicking choreographed battle scenes from popular Japanese films and television programmes such as *The Water Margin*.

In terms of developing for the PlayStation2, Endo-san has expressed some dissatisfaction with the memory capabilities but is certain that his team is squeezing every ounce of power out of Sony's machine. "Around 99.99 per cent. We spent so much time on our engine, plus we had a lot of work in getting the AI features right. We had a clear image in our mind about this project but when the time came to make it real, we had to face a few delicate machine power issues. It was insufficient. We may have put only a third of what we initially wanted to put inside the game. So we focused on the story and AI aspects. We are still working hard on both, but we also put a lot of attention on graphics. When we were still working on the first PlayStation, I really wanted to switch to PlayStation2 and see what it was capable of."

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Spike Interactive**
Developer: **Acquire**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **March 2002**









In terms of structure the team have focused on delivering a short but captivating experience. In fact, the game can be completed in a couple of hours should the player rush through all the encounters. But for those who want to savour the experience, multiple endings and routes are on offer. Everything has been geared towards encouraging players to unravel different plot threads and open up fresh locations. As in *Gran Turismo 3* a percentage meter indicates how much of the game is left to discover. Also, three katanas can be accessed, each giving the main character (who can be edited to suit the player's preferences) a new list of fighting moves.

As is always the case, *Samurai*'s finer qualities still remain cloaked in secrecy until playable code becomes available. But Acquire's insistence on elegance over brawn should give their first PlayStation2 title a unique quality to separate it from other peasant slash 'em ups.



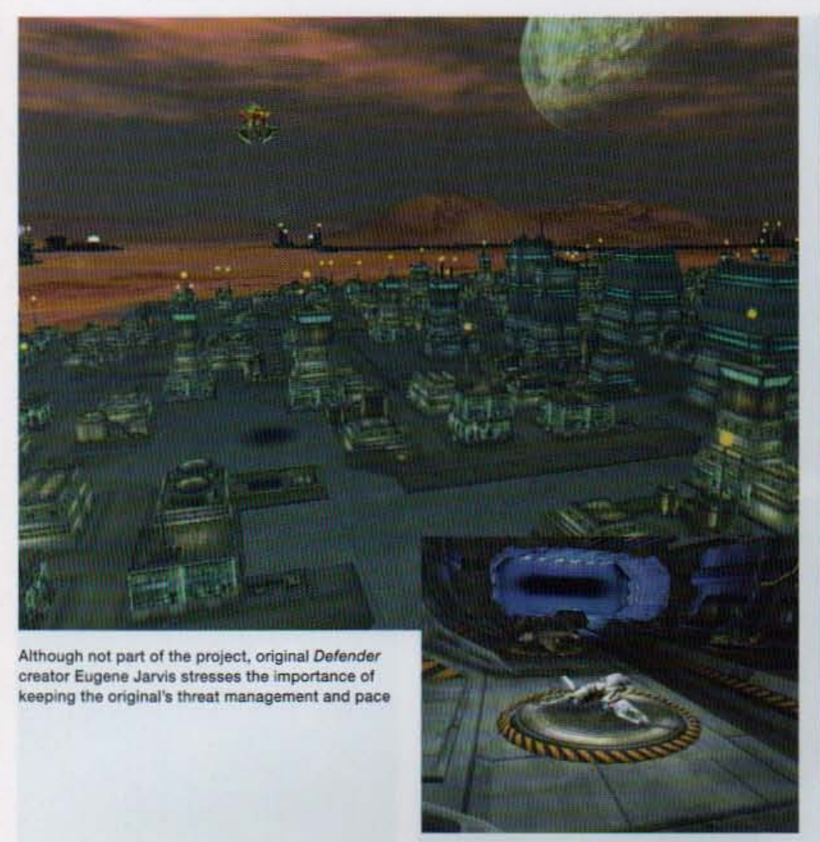
Though the game can be completed in two hours, the developer is building in many routes to ensure that players will come back for more. A percentage meter indicates how much is left to unlock



It's hoped that the combat will mimic the choreographed elegance of the best martial arts movies. The story takes place towards the end of the samurai's reign and conveys with pathos their final days

Defender

In the original you could face up to 25 simultaneous threats and kill three to four enemies per second. Can this 3D update present a similar challenge?



Although not part of the project, original *Defender* creator Eugene Jarvis stresses the importance of keeping the original's threat management and pace



The clever ground units continue to fire on enemies as you carry them from one place to another, effectively granting you a tailgunner. On occasions, you get to fly with wingmen to help your progress

Arcade classics are usually better left untouched. The games that appeared as beauty queens 20 years ago typically come back today looking like the bride of Frankenstein. But after Midway's likeable *Spy Hunter* modernisation, **Edge** can't help being intrigued by the company's next project: a reworking of Eugene Jarvis' finger-blisteringly intense space shooter, *Defender*.

"It's simply all-out action, with some small elements of strategy involved. You just jump in and start fighting, just like the original *Defender*"

"It's simply all-out action, with some small elements of strategy involved. You just jump in and start fighting, just like the original *Defender*," promises product manager **Patrick Dillon**. And in fact, the basic theme of gameplay – blasting zillions of human-abducting, visually abstract, techno-organic thingies from outer space into little, tiny pieces – remains refreshingly simple and elegant.

However, almost everything has increased in scale. For instance, the action will now range across seven different celestial bodies, from Saturn's moon, Titan, to the big, blue marble we call home. Actually, "big blue marble" may not be accurate: "It's no longer a blue planet," intimates producer **Dave Brooks**. "It's more of a red. It's not the peaceful Earth you knew."

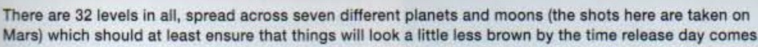
The ships, too, have evolved. There are eventually six to choose from, each with different firepower, speed, armour, and cargo capacity. Ships will also boast new abilities necessitated by the move to a 3D environment. Pre-programmed evasive manoeuvres such as a barrel roll, a quick turnaround, and even a 360-degree loop can all be executed with a simple twist of the joystick. Then there's the Super Thrust, a rocket boost that can carry the player swiftly out of danger, replacing the original game's Hyperspace feature. The Smart Bomb, too, is likely to be replaced by a variety of special weapons – each specific to a certain ship – ranging from a high-powered shot with a shotgun-like blast pattern to a small-scale nuclear detonation. Every ship will also wield some sort of basic guided-missile attack – a critical addition if the game is to preserve the frantic action of the original. "In *Star Wars Starfighter*, you're always lining your enemies up exactly in front of you in order to hit them," Brooks explains. "We didn't want that. We have so many enemies; if you shoot at something, you need to hit it."

The ships' specifications can also be upgraded over time, thanks to the humanoids you protect. There are three types of colonists, who must typically be airlifted safely back to the base. Which ship upgrades you earn depend on which kind of colonists are rescued. Save military men and they'll beef up the weaponry. Scientists, in turn, will enhance the armour, and possibly even develop a cloaking device. Finally, engineers will design faster engines or increase each ship's ability to carry things.

This cargo capacity becomes more

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Midway**
Developer: **7 Studios**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Autumn 2002 (US) TBC (UK)**





There are 32 levels in all, spread across seven different planets and moons (the shots here are taken on Mars) which should at least ensure that things will look a little less brown by the time release day comes

important than ever before, thanks to the colonists' other role – that of ground support. Enemies drop power-ups that, when deposited near (and subsequently manned by) a colonist, become fully independent ground units such as tanks or missile launchers. These units can then be strategically placed to protect an important installation, or they can even be carried around the battlefield. In fact, they're better at destroying some enemies than the ships.

You'll need every bit of help you can get, too. Five of the six original enemy types – Landers, Mutants, Baiters, Bombers, and Swarmers – are now joined by at least two brutal new classes. The first is the Ogres – massive ground units that tend to resemble huge walking tanks, or even giant centipedes. The second is so secret that Midway would reveal only its name: Raptors. Each class also mutates into several different subclasses, each with its own abilities, AI, and (hopefully) weak spots to be exploited.

They're also brutally intelligent, even utilising RTS-style group AI at times – which is no surprise, given that 7 Studios employs several members of the team that redesigned *Battlezone* for Activision. Luckily, the ground units are particularly bright as well, and certain missions grant AI-controlled wingmen. In fact, if you don't mind the fact that the frame rate dips below 60fps, two players can take to the air together, frying aliens cooperatively in splitscreen mode. Given the team's *Battlezone* roots, will there be RTS-style base building in *Defender* as well? Maybe just a little, says Brooks. "We want to get the game 100 per cent done as a shooter, as an action game, before we address that. But there are plans to incorporate some realtime strategy elements into the game."

Defender is far and away the most ambitious of Midway's arcade updates to date, and it's not completely convincing that the project will gel in the end. However, *Spy Hunter* turned out nicely, and **Edge** is reasonably confident that this development team has the skills to get the job done. Now, who needs to be bribed to make sure *Root Beer Tapper* is next?







Enemies continue to mutate throughout the game, just like uncovering new units in an RTS – there are five types of Landers alone. Any rescued humans have to be transported back to your base (main)



Virtua Fighter 4

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: Sega-AM2
Origin: Japan
Release: TBC

Previously in E9

For the first time, Sega's premier brawler arrives for the home on a console manufactured by another company. Will it convert those brought up on a *Tekken* diet?



"All I can tell you is that this is one of the best and one of the most complete games that I've ever made."

A bold statement, certainly, but sitting in AM2's demo room with an assorted selection of the European press listening to executive director **Yu Suzuki** it's difficult not to get caught up in his enthusiasm. In front of us, two one-metre high *VF4* characters are being projected onto a screen as Suzuki-san talks through the various PS2 modes. At one point, unhappy with the convincing job the projector is doing of washing out colour tones and enhancing the polygonal edges of his latest creation, he grabs the 21-inch monitor and turns it to face the crowd as a true representation of how visually close Sega-AM2 has already got to the Naomi2-powered coin-op. Things are far from finished, we're told, and none of the peripheral graphical elements (seagulls flying around, for instance) are yet in, but "in the end, I can assure you it's going to be a perfect conversion of the arcade game," Suzuki-san promises.



In addition to the various extra modes, the PS2 version also includes a bonus stage (not shown)

But it's not just the graphical quality that has kept the team busy. The Arcade mode is being supported by the usual Versus and Survival play options but, aware that many PS2 owners may not have grown up playing Sega consoles and so missed the previous *Virtua Fighter* instalments, Sega-AM2 has included an ingenious Training mode.

Novice players are given little excuse not to unravel the series' highly technical nature. In addition to traditional command training (commands displayed on screen must be copied) and free sparring, there's a Trial mode which improves your fighting skills by presenting you with a variety of fight-related tasks to be completed. Crucially, though, the speed of the command training option can be altered so that the timing of the different moves can be mastered.

Perhaps the most intriguing of the new options is the AI System. This allows you to play *sensei* to a CPU character and the aim is to turn the latter into a proficient fighter. You achieve this through direct training – taking control of one of two identical characters while the CPU learns from your moves – or, perhaps more interesting, remote training.

Here, your AI contender faces up to a CPU-controlled brawler and the action is monitored by the game system. Occasionally, the CPU pauses and asks you a question as to how your protégé should proceed – your answers enhance the overall ability of your AI protagonist. You can then test the latter's competence by entering it in the Survival or Versus modes or by taking your memory card round to a friend's house and let it face their own creation. Which, frankly, could be an entire game of its own.







Although no release date has officially been set, the team is nearing the end of the conversion process. In keeping with the technical nature of the *VF* series, nearly 3,000 moves are said to be at your disposal

Polygonal vanity

As with the arcade version, PS2 *VF4* holds some 400 hidden items within its code for you to discover while beating whoever happens to be facing your character. These objects – fashion accessories, mostly – can then be used in Character Edit to customise your fighter's appearance. Not as essential an option as the AI System (see text), true.





A Virtua Stick similar to the arcade setup will be available, and the PAL code has 50/60Hz modes



GunValkyrie

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Sega (distributed by Infogrames)**
Developer: **Smilebit**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **2002**

Previously in **E**100

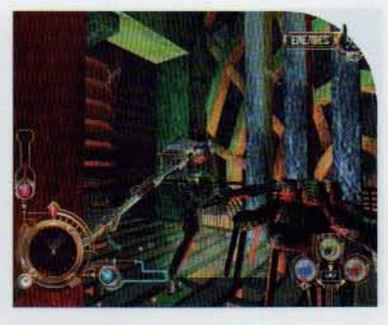
Though *Jet Set Radio Future* won all the plaudits in Cannes, Smilebit revealed that it had another ace up its sleeve

With the attention of the majority of X01-goers focused on the cel-shaded glories of *Jet Set Radio Future*, it was easy to overlook the fine progress that *GunValkyrie* continues to make. Smilebit's Shun Arai was on hand in person to demonstrate the title though, and he appeared keen to highlight both the power of the Xbox and also the way in which it was being used to imbue the title with superlative graphics.

Certainly the game takes full advantage of the nVidia chipset to deliver highly detailed, sizeable environments, and a fluidity of control that maximises the impact of hordes of fast moving, insect-like opponents. The action fits a more conventional mould than *Jet Set Radio Future*, consisting of an arcade-styled shoot 'em up, given added depth by the inclusion of DNA collection puzzles. However, it's an equally convincing prospect, and another title that demonstrates the range of which Xbox is capable.

The developer is still putting the finishing touches in place, developing a stronger design for the game's female protagonist to join the roughly finalised male character, as well as polishing the in-game, alternate history, narrative, but the signs are promising for the completed package.







Smilebit's Shun Arai admitted at X01 that the *Starship Troopers* movie was one of the inspirations for *GunValkyrie*'s sci-fi aesthetic. Certainly there's no shortage of insect-like enemies onscreen at any one time – moving in a convincingly arthropodal fashion and providing a frantic sense of pace. Microsoft has no need to be embarrassed with titles of this calibre

MotoGP

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **THQ**
Developer: **Climax**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **2002**

THQ's interpretation of the motorcycle Grand Prix licence takes advantage of the power of Xbox to deliver multiplayer authenticity. And it's nothing to do with Namco

Confusingly for those who attended Microsoft's X01 event in Cannes recently, THQ's *MotoGP* has little in common with Namco's PlayStation2 title of the same name, apart from being based on the same licence and therefore featuring similar tracks and vehicles. While Namco holds the rights to the coin-op franchise and its PlayStation2 conversion, THQ's Xbox licence has been turned towards a game which boasts a much greater focus on simulating the finer details of motorcycle racing, thanks to a game engine developed by Climax's specialist motorsports team.

Having first seen this engine nearly a year ago (in **E**94), **Edge** is confident that THQ's *MotoGP* will offer a handling model of greater sophistication than its PlayStation2 competitor, and thanks to the per-pixel capabilities of Microsoft's hardware, a greater level of visual detail. Particularly impressive is a surprisingly effective motion blur effect at top speeds, and an intuitive control scheme that mimics the effect of shifting the rider's weight – reminiscent of the sublime handling in *Excitebike 64*.

The game also boasts six different modes of play, including a fourplayer splitscreen option, an arcade mode, and a career mode to gently introduce the gamer to the nuances of the handling scheme.





Originally seen running on PlayStation2, the power of Xbox has added an attractive layer of visual detail to the sophisticated and intuitive handling of Climax's motorcycle engine, which seems to have been put to good use by THQ's acquisition of the *MotoGP* licence. It's not strictly comparable with Namco's franchise of the same name, though, given its emphasis on simulation

Gun Survivor 3: Dino Crisis

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Capcom
Developer: In-house
Origin: Japan
Release: Q1 2002

Switching drastically from survival horror to survival action, Capcom's third *Gun Survivor* title swaps zombies for dinosaurs





Having presumably exhausted the possibilities of the *Biohazard*-themed lightgun game, the Osaka-based publisher has focused its attention on another of its franchises in an effort to shoot some innovation into an increasingly competitive genre.

The game utilises the same engine used to power *Gun Survivor 2* and, as such, graphical discrepancy (other than thematic) between these two is modest. Play mechanics are similar, too, and players of *GS2* – used to dictating their progress by pushing the arcade cabinet-mounted Uzi in the required direction – should find the same freedom of movement here. The G-con2 is used to negotiate levels and dispose of the prehistoric opposition, which include all the species found in the *Dino Crisis* games with some new additions.

The dinosaurs' whereabouts are indicated on screen via an *Aliens*-style pulse-based movement detector. Given their size and agility, the idea is to keep your distance in order to spot them without attracting their attention, before unloading your ammunition into their tough-skinned hide in the desperate hope that this will stop the resulting (highly determined) charge. A daunting challenge given that you don't have the luxury of covering fire – *Gun Survivor 3* is, regrettably, oneplayer only.



Anyone acquainted with Sega's *The Lost World* coin-op will find this all rather familiar – although Capcom does promise to include gameplay-related features that should make direct comparisons inappropriate

Space Channel 5 Part 2

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Sega
Developer: UGA
Origin: Japan
Release: Spring 2002

Following the fabulous *Rez* was never going to be easy, but UGA's Tetsuya Mizuguchi is confident Ulala can take care of herself

One assumes those who fantasise over Lara Croft have never laid pupils on the delicious Ulala. Aside from being far more realistically proportioned, *Space Channel 5*'s TV-reporter-come-heroine possesses considerably more character. Despite the occasionally gratuitous gusset shot, there's nothing reprehensible about UGA's creation, either – it's incredibly stylish and strikingly desirable. Sexy, not seedy.

The sequel naturally continues the rhythm action elements of its predecessor, but varies the game dynamics slightly. No longer content with just dancing and shooting, Ulala now indulges in, among other pursuits, impressive drums-playing and a spot of karaoke (both sequences were demonstrated during a recent press visit to Sega).

And before you ask, yes, Michael Jackson also makes a return. Known as Space Michael in the game, he plays the director of the TV station employing Ulala, and has a more significant role this time around.

The subtleties of the improvements should only properly reveal themselves through extended play. Until then, you'll just have to take Mizuguchi-san's promise that *SC5 Part 2* is "more crazy, more happy, more musical" at face value.







Ulala can now play instruments and happily breaks into song as *SC5* incorporates a more Broadway musical atmosphere into its funky MTV video-style dance routines. Throughout the game you also get to collect items which you can then use to change the character's appearance. The developer says this time around you can expect things to be "more dramatic"

Kingdom Hearts

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **SCEE**
Developer: **Square/Disney**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Winter (Japan), Q1 2002 (UK)**

Disney and Square create an RPG with cuteness and menace in equal measure – but the lack of innovation may dissatisfy all but the younger gamer

The result of the Square/Disney alliance first announced at last year's PlayStation Festival, *Kingdom Hearts* follows the ambitious quest of Sora, Court Wizard Donald and Captain Goofy. They team up to rid the world of the evil Heartless, morphing villains out to usurp the Disney Kingdom and steal the hearts and souls of its inhabitants. In addition, both parties are looking for lost pals: Riku and Kairi, who disappeared when a storm levelled Sora's home village, and King Mickey, who has been similarly spirited away. Time is running out, though... The enemy is recruiting classic Disney villains to its cause, and there's nothing its new allies would like more than the imminent destruction of Disney's courageous do-gooders.

Character modelling and animation is superb throughout, of course, but **Edge** still feels the camera is a little too close to the protagonists for comfort, with the narrow viewing angle annoyingly restrictive. The somewhat angular gaming environments lack detail, too. More worryingly, during the presentation we attended (as well as the free play time that followed), **Edge** couldn't detect a single original idea in terms of play mechanics. Of course, none of this will matter a jot to the younger audience at which *Kingdom Hearts* is aimed.







It's not just the aesthetic difference between the two companies' characters that ensures these clash when appearing on the screen together – mixing the individual styling of the various Disney representatives also looks odd. More importantly, however, is the realisation that the game seems intent on following a disappointing formulaic action adventure template

Wizards

Format: **Game Boy Advance**
Publisher: **TBC**
Developer: **Bits Studios**
Origin: **UK**
Release: **Q2 2002**

Bits Studios' magical realtime strategy game demonstrates the flexibility of the GBA and provides an early challenger to *Advance Wars* in the handheld stakes



Wizards borrows elements from a range of games, but melds them into an intriguing whole. The game can be played at macro- or micro-levels, from managing from armies of hundreds, to controlling a single character

Further testament to the flexibility of the GBA hardware, and thus the diversity of its portfolio, appears in the shape of *Wizards* – an update of Bits Studios' GBC title, *Warlocked*. This colourful real-time strategy game combines *Gauntlet* graphics with *Cannon Fodder* combat sensibilities and *Pikmin*-style puzzle elements.

The player has to build and control an army of magical warriors with which to wage war across Talismania and rid it of an evil sorceress. In singleplayer story mode, opposing armies are artificially intelligent, attacking and defending with due cunning, while four multiplayer options (Capture the Flag, Gladiators, Dominion and Wizzball) cater for up to four human opponents, and can be played with a single cartridge.

Thirty levels, sub-quests, plus multiple routes and endings provide plenty of replay value, and experience gained in the story mode can be used in the multiplayer games. Despite the apparent complexity, Bits Studios maintains that the control system offers easy management of the on-screen hordes, while a training mode introduces players to the game mechanics.

If *Wizards* does manage to squeeze all of the above into a GBA cartridge, then Nintendo's superb *Advance Wars* (9 out of 10, **E**104) might soon have some serious competition in the handheld strategy department.






PS one
青山安田ビル
SONY
COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT
SONY



Inside...

Sony Computer Entertainment Inc

Forget joypads. The future of videogaming is microphones, DV cameras and obedient alsatians. Edge ventures into SCEI

A true gamer doesn't like Sony Computer Entertainment. A real videogame player doesn't own a living room with a PlayStation in it. A genuine electronic entertainment connoisseur would rather step away from the comforting security of virtual worlds altogether than face the thought of having to play the tidal wave of shallow, massmarket PS-branded software engulfing the world's populace.

A True Gamer needs to grow up.

SCEI is a business. So are Sega, Microsoft and Nintendo (the latter, in particular, frequently reminds journalists of this very fact). Sony didn't enter the industry because of some uncontrollable philanthropic urge to spread the potential splendour of interactive digital pursuits to the masses. It did it to make money.

No surprises there, then. The strategy included the targeting of a demographic group that until then had been quite content with just music and films, and in the process making a mockery of the niche market Sega and Nintendo had previously concentrated on. Of course, popularity has a price and the possibility of beautifully crafted software being ignored in favour of craftily marketed hideousness preying on the uninformed becomes increasingly real – the past two Christmas best sellers (*Tomorrow Never Dies* and *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*) painfully illustrate this.

What is remarkable, however, is the continued opposition the company faces from within devoted gaming circles. Irrational accusations regularly fly, leading a casual observer to conclude SCEI must be responsible for bringing some terrible plague into the videogaming community.

It's one – admittedly skewed – view. True, too many PS titles consist of shockingly underdeveloped code clinging desperately to a licence. Too many are depressingly exploitative sequels. Too many are poor imitations of depressingly exploitative sequels. But amidst this sea of greed oysters can be found and experienced gamers shouldn't have too much

Photography: SCEI









Yoakeno Mariko is remarkably silly and all the better for it. The game includes a series of clichéd movie moments (western, '80s horror, kung-fu, samurai, musical, sitcom) which you must sing along to as instructed by using the microphone set-up (left). Then just sit back and enjoy the show via the replay







SCEA staff demo some of the latest ideas for exploiting the PS2's connectivity. Add a digital camera and the console can 'see' moving objects such as a red ball (top) and can then get the onscreen character to track it accordingly. Or you can 'catch' a ball and throw it around the screen with the flick of a wrist (above) while admiring one of several impressive realtime visual effects

trouble knowing where to dive for the *PaRappas*, *Ape Escapes*, *FantaVisions* and *Xis*, to name but four innovative and delightfully divergent in-house Sony productions.

In this area, SCEI is largely beyond reproach. It may have arrived on the scene without heritage but it's certainly been active in its attempts at encouraging PS licensees to broaden their development horizon by coming up with more than just the standard diet of racing, sports and 3D adventure titles. And its efforts continue.

Deka-Voice, at which the title hints, is a voice controlled title using a USB microphone headset manufactured, predictably, by Japanese peripheral specialist ASCII. You play a detective (controlled via joypad) who faces a variety of precarious situations his cel-shaded world throws his way. One of the missions, for instance, sees you in the city sewers with a faithful German shepherd by your heels. A bomb is known to have been set somewhere in this murky setting and it's your job to guide your canine partner to the explosive device before the detonator does its job.

You can issue simple commands (go forward, jump, stop, come here, sit, shake hands, etc), but in this case getting it to smell a sample of C4 before embarking on the mission saves mindless walking around. You're also in constant radio communication with your colleagues back at the precinct whom you can ask for help should anything unexpected come up. Occasionally, the boys back at base will ask you for assistance – this usually entails giving descriptions of evidence and photographing suspects or situations. The various missions are expected to offer suitable variety – one has you attempting to calm a chair-tied scientist who has a vibration-sensitive explosive device firmly strapped to his quivering legs by talking him out of his agitated state.

The voice recognition element has already made its way into other games, of course – most notably perhaps in the decidedly adventurous *Seaman* – and with each outing the concept becomes increasingly convincing. The action in *Deka-Voice* may seem a little erratic due to the nature of the technology employed but it's yet another step towards providing a genuine voice-controlled gaming experience. The game's vocabulary is limited to around 200 words per mission, which the team feels is a comfortable amount. Due next summer, the possibility of a five-language system for European PAL release is currently being investigated.

Another SCEI-developed microphone-utilising title but one that is (sadly) unlikely to travel to Europe as an official release is *Yoakeno Mariko*, a highly entertaining take on Japan's love of Karaoke. As one of eight, highly stylised parodies of Hollywood stereotypes,







Although *Deka-Voice* is played mostly in thirdperson perspective, you can switch over to firstperson at any time should you need to get a better view of your surroundings. The system is a little slow at present, but remains promising

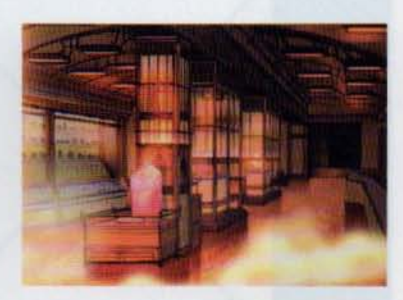
you must sing your way through themed filmic sequences. Though certainly entertaining , the real enjoyment then comes from watching a replay of the various scenes spliced together to form a coherent storyline suitably backed up by your dulcet tones (or not, as the case may be) which have been kindly recorded by the hardware. To really improve matters, the addition of a second microphone automatically reworks the differing musical stages into duets.

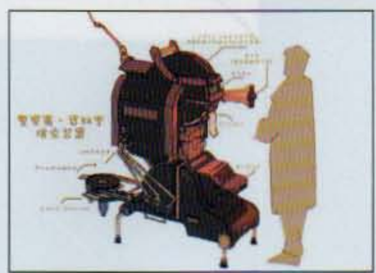
Unlike *Deka-Voice*, *Yoakeno Mariko* doesn't rely upon a voice recognition system but instead focuses on timing, volume and tone. So while your voice input has to match the phrase musically, you're not required to say the exact words – useful for anyone wishing to import the perfect Christmas family title after its December 6 domestic release.

Both of the above games are the obvious result of SCEI's continuing R&D programme, which since the arrival of PlayStation2 has seen some interesting concepts being investigated. Specifically, the connective ability of the company's 128bit console and the videogaming possibilities afforded by this are of particular interest to the department. The latter has recently been focusing its talent on Broadband Human Interface, thus conveniently backing up Ken Kutaragi's vision of the machine's future (see p42–43). The notion is reasonably straightforward – to come up with a way for the player to interact with the action onscreen without the use of an input device other than his/her own limbs. A camera on top of the TV set detects movement and subsequently applies the consequence of that movement to the various objects on screen.

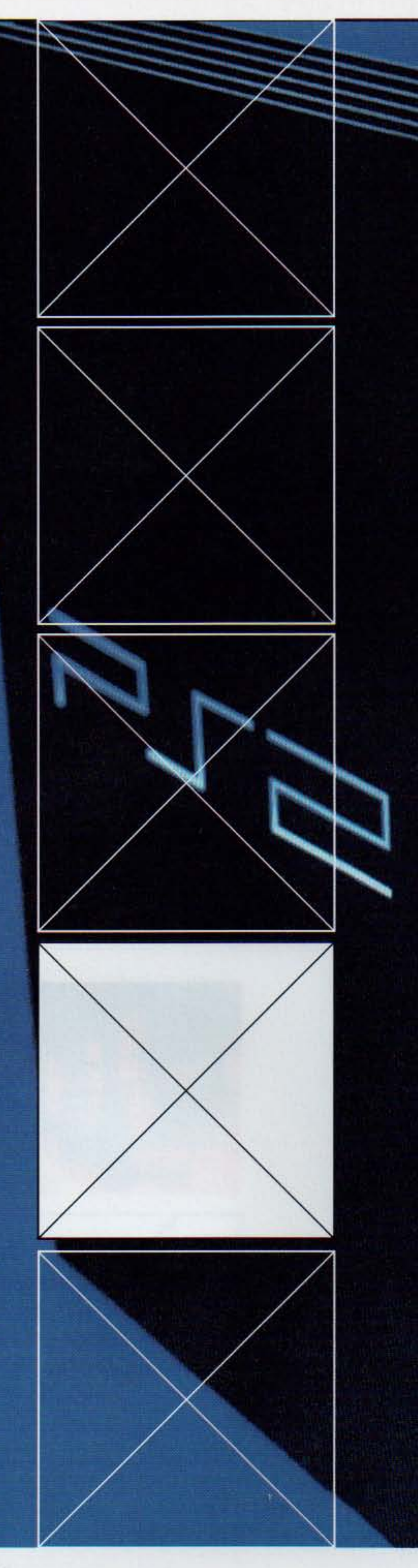
SCEI representatives demonstrated this by preparing six demo pods with a variety of camera set-ups (mostly Web cam and DV units). A trigger zone at the centre of the screen allowed users to rotate through the various effects on offer (see captions) but by far the most intriguing was being able to 'grab' a ball and bounce it around the screen. The system still has trouble coping with anything other than calm and considered hand actions but it's certainly an area that deserves attention. The moment the system can be successfully worked into a videogaming scenario expect another inventive SCEI release.

And that's not necessarily what you would expect from a company that, according to some individuals, is doing its best to kill off the world of electronic entertainment.





A distinct visual style for a distinct game. Other stages in *Deka-Voice* include a car chase where you must communicate the appropriate directional changes to your partner and an escape from a building with the help of a helicopter. The release date is currently expected to be set for the summer





Ken Kutaragi

Content and network. The only two areas currently concerning the 'Father of PlayStation'. Edge catches up with the man at the top of Sony's videogaming empire

SCEI's president and CEO is convinced the company has now elevated the PlayStation phenomenon from hobby to established culture. He sees PlayStation2 – currently produced at a monthly rate of 1.8 million units – as the evolution in digital consumer electronics. In one of SCEI's conference rooms, in front of the European videogaming press, he explains why.

Press: Who do you see as the SCEI's strongest competitor?
Ken Kutaragi: Within the game platform category, it will be Xbox and GameCube. However, we see them as a stimulant to each other in that, like PlayStation and PlayStation2, there is a common vision to enhance the development of computer entertainment. We actually think that for general consumers, mobile phones and the Internet could be a direct competitor as well as an ally that will provide us with great possibilities.

Press: How do you see Xbox and GameCube?
KK: I believe they are cultivating the market from their own field of expertise. With GameCube, Nintendo started out by targeting the younger market like N64. As for Xbox, Microsoft has made a PC-like approach.

Press: What do you see PlayStation 2 bringing to videogaming?
KK: Sony Computer Entertainment will expand the market from a kids-focused toy market to a computer entertainment market that is widely accepted by a variety of users. PlayStation has been accepted in more than 100 countries in the world and PS2 is penetrating at an even faster pace. Supported by backward compatibility – an industry first – several hundred million people in the world are already enjoying the world of computer entertainment. Games have now grown to become one of the primary categories in home entertainment.

Press: The introduction of 3D worlds and online play have revolutionised gaming. Where do you see the next step coming from?
KK: The next revolution will be broadband networking. Game software itself is realtime broadband content. Game consoles have an overwhelming calculating power compared to regular PCs. A few years ago, it was said that PCs would take over game console business but now even Microsoft has embarked on the game console business. In the future, we believe that TV monitors at home will be integrated with a progressive scanning monitor like big screen digital TVs and PCs. Broadband





Internet may take over not only telecommunications but broadcasting also. Until now, the world of gaming was limited to a packaged media and hardware environment. With the broadband network, people from around the world will be connected 24 hours a day. Gaming will see no limitation and will evolve into a new form of entertainment.

Press: When can players expect to be playing online on their PS2?

KK: In Japan, we've embarked on a field test to structure the network communication environment through PS2. This test is being conducted by SCEI and other developers. We see this test as an investigation and establishment period of the network technology environment. We are also working on the development of broadband network terminals at arcades with Namco and Sega. These will be the basis of the future network connection at home. The schedule will depend on each territory in accordance with the expansion of broadband networks in each region.

Press: How optimistic are you for the future of the gaming industry?

KK: We believe that the computer entertainment business will continue to grow. We also believe that a broadband network will create a new world of entertainment. It will be an issue for us if the expansion of broadband networking slows down with unfair competition due to government policy or a monopoly act. Yet, we believe that the expansion of broadband networking will not be affected since network business is open and borderless.

Press: How do you currently view your successor to the PS2?

KK: In the broadband network era, servers and router switchers will be reinforced. If each household is connected via a broadband network, each individual will be able to access freely whenever and wherever. With this paradigm shift, client terminals may not come in a case format or include a storage media. We think that the next generation platform should incorporate such a concept.

Press: What is your personal vision of videogaming?

KK: Content is culture and culture is diverse. I hope that many talented creators will share our vision and join our platform. I expect that whole new forms of entertainment will be created. I hope that at the end, we become the bond between people all over the world.





Photography: Martin Thompson



Teiyu Goto

Don't like the look of the PS2? Love the PSone but no longer attracted to the PlayStation? Designers of consoles rarely get a chance to explain themselves. Now, one does

Head of PlayStation product design and corporate identity design as well as chief art director of Value Design Studio Group at Sony's creative centre, Goto-san (born in 1953) joined the electronics giant in 1977 after graduating from Kanazawa College of Art (Shigeru Miyamoto is a fellow alumnus). Here he takes a retrospective look at the design ethic behind SCEI's products.

PlayStation

As you know, when Sony Computer Entertainment started the PlayStation business Sony was not part of the game industry. The market leader then was by far Nintendo with the SNES. Since the Super Nintendo represented the standard from the users' understanding of videogaming hardware, Sony had to break through with a new image. Up to this point many of the hardware providers had designed their product targetting a younger age group – low teens, primarily – whereas our concept was to appeal to a broad audience. We didn't want adults to be turned away because the hardware didn't look 'cool'.

As a result the original PlayStation doesn't have the look of a typical game console. It's a very simple yet cool design – you get used to it but it does not grow old. When planning it, the one aspect we considered very important was that it had to be very strong and stable so that even when children play with it – children can be rough with products – the hardware would resist being damaged. I approached this as a soap box type of design – it's very steady, the cover is round to reflect the shape of the disc inside and the buttons have been designed so that it's easy for people to press and use them.

The most important of the design concepts is actually the design of the controller pad. The team spent more than a year just designing the controller. Up until the release of the PlayStation hardware many of the users were used to seeing flat controller pads. However, I concentrated on the grip that consumers would get by holding the controller. Also, because the games were about to evolve into 3D I wanted to make sure the design concept matched this – we therefore have a more three dimensional type of controller design.

PlayStation2

The original PlayStation was more of a game console concept obviously to break into the industry and get the PS platform known. As we evolved into the PlayStation2, Ken Kutaragi was one of the people who specifically asked me to consider that we were no longer looking





at just game consoles. As you can see from the PS2 we have today, it has a DVD playback function and it will, in the near future, have network connectivity. So Ken Kutaragi wanted the platform to show our wish to expand.

I thought about this for quite some time and my solution to this was the Earth. The reason being that we are part of this world and as people we would like to make products that expand into the universe. I focused on the colours blue and black. Blue represents the Earth, meaning water or life, and the black segment represents the rest of the universe.

The PS2 hardware clearly evolved quite significantly from the original PlayStation platform. The contents are very condensed – simply because we're expanding in terms of technological performance does not mean we wanted to make the hardware huge. We wanted to keep it compact or, at least, make it look compact. That was one of the necessities in my mind. You can see the PS2 design consists of two boxes, if you like: the larger side and a smaller side. You could just do a simple one box design but that would look bulky – we made it a two box design to give the impression that it is smaller than it really is.

In order to positively convey the PS2's high performance, I concentrated on keeping the design sharp. There are grooves in the design and these are for several reasons. One is to hide the fact that the PS2 console has a tray. If you do not have these grooves you will see the disc tray will stand out significantly. Another is to hide the connector segments of the console – by adding those grooves, it's harder to recognise them than with a grooveless design.

PSone

The main concept behind this was to keep consumers happy in terms of their enjoyment of the PlayStation platform. So the whole idea was for the PSone to be more compact and something that you can carry wherever you go. We wanted to make sure the main design concept matched the original so as to not confuse original PS users – so the cover, the button layout, everything is very similar.

I don't necessarily relate to Japanese tradition when I design products. However, I am aware, possibly because of my genes [Goto-san's father was a designer of kimonos] of the balance you see in the beauty of Japanese products in general – in terms of quality, design and function. This is quite a Japanese approach and possibly because of my upbringing I have a keen eye on how designs are balanced and why it works.





ATARI JAGUAR
GONE AND FORGOTTEN
APRIL 1996

IN
LOVING MEMORY
OF
SEGA DREAMCAST
CEASED PRODUCTION
MARCH 2001

IN LOVING MEMORY OF



Requiem for a dream:
The life and death of Dreamcast

It was the first 128bit console. It offered out-of-the-box Internet access and boasted some of the most innovative games of the last five years. But did Dreamcast ever really stand a chance? **Edge** looks back at Sega's heroic failure

Did Sega scupper Dreamcast's chances years before it was even launched? Quite possibly. In the early '90s, the company announced that it would be delaying the Western release of the Saturn so it could launch a series of Mega Drive add-ons. Although a failure in Japan, the 16bit console had been a huge success in the US and Europe, and Sega wanted to extend that market for as long as possible. The plan was not a success. The Mega CD (1993) coupled a CD-ROM unit to the basic Mega Drive set-up, but all this led to was a glut of low-res FMV sequences and poor interactive movies. Later came the 32x, this time intended to provide Western MD owners with a stepping stone into the 32bit age. But at £170 it was a step few were willing to take.

Not only did this add-on policy prompt consumer confusion, it also alienated Western developers who didn't relish the prospect of drawing out a dying machine's market share. At the same time, Sony was actively courting the global development community with its exciting *new* console. In December 1993, SCE bought early PS-X dev kits to London and left the invited throng of industry pundits breathless. When the tech specs started circulating, Sega simply panicked, realising its Saturn project was underpowered – particularly in the area of 3D visuals, which Sony had rightly identified as a key means to attract an attention-deficient mass audience.

At the last minute, Sega President Hayao Nakayama instructed Sega R&D to beef up Saturn, adding an extra SH-2 chip and graphics processor. It was too little, too late. The PlayStation boasted user-friendly dev kits complete with excellent graphics libraries and SDKs. Saturn was a complex beast sporting dual processors and reams of documentation, inaccessible to many fledgling coders. Even Yu Suzuki admitted that only a handful of Sega programmers had the hardware hacking ability to get the best out of the machine. Most publishers just didn't have the patience and quickly

Most publishers just didn't have the patience and quickly deserted the machine… Some, like EA, a huge ally of Sega during the 16bit era, never came back…

deserted. Some, like EA, a huge ally of Sega during the 16bit era, never came back.

Yet, despite the setbacks, Sega's arrogance and complacency continued – even in its retail operations. "Sony's sales support is second-to-none," states ex-'DC-UK' writer and retailer **Neil Randall.** "It treats the Indies and Multiples fairly and will offer the accolade of 'Approved Sony Centre' to any store that turns over a high enough





Sega Europe committed every marketing folly in the book to push Dreamcast, including sponsoring a football team and projecting game images onto the Houses of Parliament

volume of PlayStation units each year. This is rewarded by discounts for bulk ordering, plus an increased credit limit. Sega offers no such incentive. It's slow to recredit for faulty items, fails to provide price-protection when price-drops come and is incredibly biased in favour of the Multiples. Many retailers gave up on Sega years ago."

By the close of the '90s, Sega had a measly 3% share of the console market – its brand image left in tatters by costly hardware errors and poor relationships with publishers and retailers. Unsurprisingly, the Sega name was conspicuous by its absence when the company revealed the Dreamcast design. It wanted a clean break from the past. But while consumers puzzled over a swirl, retailers and publishers didn't forget Sega's past misdemeanours in a hurry.

The two-headed monster

Dreamcast went though the most complex gestation in console development history. Rumours of a 128bit machine began seeping out of Japan in late 1996, and the first dubiously leaked technical specs followed soon afterwards in early 1997, listing a Microsoft OS, modem, Hitachi SH-4 processor and a Videologic Power VR graphics chipset – all of which was denied by Sega. In March, however, **Edge** received word that the machine was now codenamed 'Black Belt' and would actually be employing graphics technology designed by 3Dfx.

Barely six months later, Bernie Stolar, then CEO of Sega America, rang 3Dfx to tell them the deal was off. Suddenly, Videologic was back in the frame and Saturn 2 had a new nickname: Dural. Then, all became clear: Sega was actually developing *two* versions of its 128bit Saturn sequel: one ('Black Belt') based in the US with a 3Dfx chipset, the other in Japan (Dural) with Videologic graphics hardware. Dural proved itself the more worthy system.

To confuse people further, the project name was later changed to 'Katana' (via 'Dragon' and, **Edge** has it on good authority, 'Guppy'), before branding company InterBrand was brought in to thinktank a proper moniker that everyone could agree on. After going through 5,000 alternatives, they came up with Dreamcast.

Bad timing

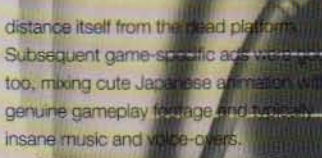
Dreamcast premiered in Japan on November 27, 1998; PlayStation 2 followed on March 4, 2000. This gave Sega's machine just over a year to stamp its authority on the videogame industry. Which, with Sony making extravagant claims for PS2 throughout the period (its major press releases often coincided with key Dreamcast events), just wasn't enough. When **Gary Penn**, now of Denki, said, "It's hard to see the Dreamcast as anything other than a Milky Way: a snack to consume between PlayStations," his comments were to prove painfully prescient.

Would an earlier launch have helped? Probably not. Go back a year and PSone – which continued to outsell DC throughout its natural lifespan in Japan – was still in its confident middle age, selling units for fun. Alternatively, several insiders **Edge** spoke to claimed the whole situation might have been different if DC had gone head-to-head against Sony's black box.

"Until PS2 finally launched, we all expected photo-realistic graphics," said one source who wishes to remain anonymous. "When Sony finally shipped PS2 with *Tekken* and *Ridge Racer*, people finally started to realise just how good Dreamcast was. The inferior *Dead or Alive 2* conversion rammed this message home. It's easy to say this now, but a head-to-head launch against PS2 might have been a lot different. Judged against each other a year ago, it's amazing how badly PS2 comes off on price, quantity and quality of software. Perhaps Dreamcast just couldn't compete against the 'imagined' power of PlayStation 2."

Marketing madness

The Dreamcast publicity machine started well. Before the Japanese launch, a series of brilliant teaser ads were aired which featured company manager Yukawa Hidekazu being mocked by kids for the failure of Saturn. It was rare piece of self-effacing wit from Sega, but also an important strategic move, enabling the company to



distance itself from the dead platform. Subsequent game-specific ads were good too, mixing cute Japanese animation with genuine gameplay footage and typically insane music and voice-overs.

Yet in two other key territories Sega made significant oversights. Believing that building a 'brand' for the machine was more important than actually showing what it was capable of, both Sega America and Sega Europe commissioned cool advertising agencies to create offbeat concept campaigns for the pre-launch marketing onslaught. In the US, ad firm Foote, Cone and Belding (who counted MTV and Levis among its previous clients) devised the 'It's thinking' TV ads, in which disembodied voices whispered about some unseen technology as jump-cut footage of eyes and mouths strobed on screen. At the same time, magazine ads showed a bald male figure, his face contorted in pain, with 9.9.99 (the US launch date) tattooed on his forehead.

Admittedly, the ads provoked discussion, but there was a problem – as **Simon Cox**, Launch Editor of America's official Dreamcast magazine was later told. "A high-level exec confessed to me that the '9.9.99' and 'It's thinking' campaigns did produce amazing awareness from the public in their New York test-market. As many as 45% of the people they spoke to in the demographic they aimed at had seen the '9.9.99' ad and knew that 'Dreamcast' was coming. But guess what? Hardly any of them knew what the fuck Dreamcast *actually was!*"

This was by no means Sega of America's only marketing *faux pas*. Later, some bright spark working on a new print campaign, decided to represent the launch of Dreamcast as a storm approaching America, by PhotoShopping the cursive DC logo onto a standard weather map. Again, Cox points










The early Japanese ads for Dreamcast made a star out of Sega manager Yukawa Hidekazu, who later attended the launch of the console










The first European ads for Dreamcast attempted to emphasis the 'lifestyle' appeal of the machine. Hence no screenshots and a Robbie Williams soundtrack

out a fatal flaw: "Most storm fronts already look like – yep – DC swirls, so Sega basically spent a couple of hundred thousand dollars to place a satellite picture of 'some clouds' in print mags across the country."

Meanwhile in Europe, the initial UK TV campaign proved to be not only obscure (barbers racing to shave heads, kids throwing stones at buoys) but also legally contentious. The ASA ruled that Sega's "up to six billions players" catchphrase had to be removed as the console did not yet support online gaming. As with America, there were also no in-game images – in fact, these didn't appear in TV advertising until Sega's original agency was abandoned and a new outfit came up with the ads for *Sega Bass fishing* – several months after the machine's launch.

There were plenty of other promotional follies. Sega Europe famously sponsored Arsenal for many millions of pounds. The intention was to show European publishers that the company had money to spend and was serious about its latest videogaming venture. Unfortunately, no-one noticed: Arsene Wenger's side went on to have a thoroughly mediocre domestic and European season. (Two other Sega-sponsored European teams, Sampdoria and St Etienne, gave similarly poor performances).

"It was a strange move for a hardware manufacturer to be associated with one particular club," commented a source at a major European publisher. "Sega's aim should have been to appeal to the general public as opposed to siding with one particular football club. The one thing I found especially confusing was the fact that they had Dreamcast on one shirt and Sega on the other. This sent out a confused message and certainly diluted the impact. With hindsight I'm sure the large amount of money that was tied up in football sponsorship could have been put to better use."

The one success Sega did enjoy was when it projected European stereotypes onto the Houses of Parliament during Euro 2000, to publicise the launch of online game *Chu Chu Rocket*. It was bold, it was confrontational, it was – at last – desperate. It's just a pity the TV ads were taken off air because the ITC thought them capable of inciting racial hatred.

Launch hell

It's difficult to conceive of a more disaster-strewn global launch. In Japan, the première was delayed by just a week, but a shortage of NEC graphics chips meant that fewer than expected units reached the shelves. 100,000 machines were shifted on the first day, compared to 600,000 PS2s. The US launch was far more successful. It was on time (9.9.99) and the attendant hype – including most major game retailers opening at midnight – meant that 100,000 units were sold in the first few hours, netting an immediate $97m for Sega and surpassing the opening weekend gross of 'The Phantom Menace'. But this fortunate turn of events was to prove shortlived. In Britain, the big day was delayed by a month because of problems instigating the Internet service. Even worse, the eventual launch of the machine in Australia was marred by the complete absence of Sega games, browser discs, demo discs or peripherals. Eventually, distributor Ozisoft published a press release claiming that its entire stock of Dreamcast games, shipped in a week earlier from Europe, was being held in customs as the crates were "insufficiently labelled."

Thirdparty blues

It doesn't take a genius to guess why so few publishers were willing to support Dreamcast with significant (ie expensive) projects. The failure of the Saturn and the omnipotence of the PlayStation brand didn't bode well for the new machine. There were also concerns about Sega's health – as **Greg Zeschuk**, Joint CEO at Bioware, points out: "I believe that publishers were wary of Sega's ability to support the system with marketing and promotion – that's where the Dreamcast lost the battle, not on the quality of the system."

Certainly, Sega was in visible financial difficulty. In 2000, the company posted multi-

Sega Europe famously sponsored Arsenal.

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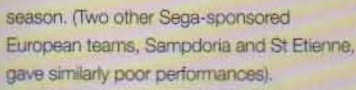









Japanese ads managed to be cool and quirky yet still contain screenshots. Sega Europe finally got the message with *Sega Bass Fishing*. Too late






The near-subliminal advertising employed by Sega in the US was sometimes a little too subtle. The company's weather map ads (left) used a storm shaped like a DC logo... They look like that anyway!

billion yen losses for the third consecutive year, thanks to the death of Saturn, a downturn in the coin-op market and the expense of researching and developing Dreamcast. The signs weren't good, and many publishers reacted by adopting a 'wait and see' policy. For some, this meant ignoring the machine altogether; for others, it meant dipping their toes hesitantly into the water, either by buying Japanese games to distribute in Europe (Activision with *Blue Stinger*, Ubi Soft with *Evolution*) or by porting over PC games almost untouched (Eidos with *Tomb Raider* and *Nomad Soul*; Virgin with *Resident Evil 2*; Take 2 with *GTA2*, etc).

Unfortunately, by the time publishers realised Dreamcast was an excellent machine that could perform against PS2 (DC games dominated the Tokyo Game Show and E3 in 2000), it was too late. Ambitious conversion projects like *Black & White*, *Half-Life* and *Colin McRae Rally* faded away into nothing because consumers had already stopped buying the hardware – bored of waiting for new releases. It was the classic case of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Once again, the sickly hand of Sega may have had a role in the hardware's demise. "In those early days, everyone wanted Dreamcast to work – especially the thirdparties," claims UK 'Official Dreamcast' Editor **Mark Higham**. "They were pissed off with Sony – many publishers felt like Sony had them over a barrel – and Sega were the big white hope. Instead, Sega were squeezing thirdparties over margins while at the same time doing everything they could to push their own games."

However, **Philip Oliver**, MD of Blitz Games, believes there was never any intention among publishers to support the



In 2000, both E3 (above) and the Tokyo Game Show were dominated by Dreamcast games. But too late to get the mass market on board

system: "The big publishers were happy making loads of money from PlayStation and didn't want to dilute the market with another console when they were creaming in money from the most stable platform the industry has ever seen."

Which was unfortunate, because when developers were given the chance to work with Dreamcast they generally found it a decent experience. "It was a great machine to work for," confirms **Pete Hawley** at Lionhead, whose *Black & White* conversion was canned when Sega pulled the plug on Dreamcast. "Some would argue that the libraries and dev tools were a little confusing, but generally it was a good machine to work on once you'd made that choice. Sega's thirdparty dev support was excellent, too."

Zeschuk concurs: "We found it powerful and reasonably well documented. It had better graphics, sound and architecture than anything that came before it, and some of its features are still better than many of the current and upcoming consoles. If the winner of the console wars was based on merit, I believe the Dreamcast would still be around. It truly was a wonderful system to work on."

Online ambition

From the start, Dreamcast's online capabilities were a key system component. Sega watched the astonishing growth of the Internet throughout the '90s and became convinced that it represented the future of videogame entertainment. In fact, the idea for allying such hardware with the burgeoning virtual highway went back further, even to before Dreamcast.

But did Sega lay its bets on the wrong technology? **Edge**'s Tokyo Correspondent, **Christophe Kagotani**, certainly thinks so: "The online stuff was coming too early. The market wasn't ready. People wanted something new and simple. DVD was one answer, and SCEI used it perfectly. At the same time, Sega wasn't able to explain to people that Dreamcast could offer great quality 3D. People still thought SCEI had the edge." A similar problem affected the Western launches, where most of Sega's marketing went into pushing the online gaming aspect – which in the UK didn't emerge until over six months after launch.

This caused considerable headaches for the official magazine, as Higham points out: "In those early days it was all very strange, because Sega wanted to proof

"If the winner of the console wars was based on merit, I believe the DC would still be around. We found it powerful and... well-documented... It truly was a wonderful machine to work on"

Even before the death of Dreamcast, Sega Japan was broadening its business into new areas. Hence its range of Internet cafés

Most wanted

The Dreamcast has been home to some of the most outlandish and enjoyable titles in recent memory. Here's **Edge**'s top ten for the format



1. Phantasy Star Online (Sonic Team)
A brilliant multiplayer online RPG for normal people. Enjoy it now while the servers are still working



2. Samba de Amigo (Sonic Team)
One of the most hilarious rhythm action games ever made. Make sure you also get the maracas and dance mat



3. Jet Set Radio (Smilebit)
Cel-shaded graffiti brilliance from Sega. At a time when everyone else is slavishly attempting ultra visual realism, too



4. Bangai-O (Treasure)
Devilishly old skool 2D space shooter with *Thrust*-style inertia. This could probably never happen on PS2



5. F355 Challenge (AM2)
Incredibly realistic driving sim from Ferra fetishist Yu Suzuki. Gorgeous visuals ease you through the learning curve



Dreamcast boasted some interesting peripherals, including the VM unit, Seaman microphone and Webcam

every page. They knew they weren't going to get the online thing working in time for the launch, but they couldn't tell us. So we wrote long features about everything that Dreamcast could do, and then they came along on press day and pulled out all references to the online capabilities. They wouldn't tell us why, just that there were some concerns the online facilities wouldn't be up and running from day one, so they didn't want to risk building consumers' expectations. No-one liked to mention the fact that the TV ads were talking about being able to play against six billion players worldwide." In the meantime, users were left with slow, cumbersome Internet access, supported by too few servers and no 'BT Surftime'-style budget options.

Yet the games, when they finally arrived, *were* stunning. The online mode in *NFL 2K1* attracted a dedicated following in the States, while in Europe *Chu Chu Rocket* provided a pure slice of pure 2D gameplay heaven – wacky, frenzied and, most importantly, free to Dream Arena subscribers. Then came *Quake III* and the must-have *Phantasy Star Online* – the irresistible multiplayer RPG from Sonic Team. "Over 250,000 people were playing *Phantasy Star Online* in Japan," claims Famitsu DC Editor **Koji Aizawa**. "That's one of the most successful online games in the country. But it was too late for Dreamcast and Sega. Also, the calling cost in Japan is still expensive. That's a really big problem."

It is indeed. While Sega Europe claims that a third of Euro Dreamcast owners subscribed to Dream Arena at its height, Simon Cox reckons the online service only ever attracted around 15% of DC owners in the States. Ultimately, the Dreamcast modem was a brave but underused experiment – one Sony didn't dare attempt with its ultra-conservative PS2.

Innovation machine

With Dreamcast, Sega introduced a wealth of new ideas both in terms of hardware and software. The VMU – part-memory card, part-portable game system which, when slotted into the joypad, became a part-private stats screen (easily concealable from other players) – was a great concept, sadly only exploited fully by a handful of titles. The pad itself, although criticised for its bulky angular styling, offered considerable analogue depth via its two triggers, and was just big enough for chunky Western hands. Unlike PlayStation2, delivered a year later, Dreamcast came with a modem and four joypad ports as *standard* – a value-for-money stance that obviously doesn't interest Sony and its peripheral-manufacturing partners.

The internal architecture still stands up to scrutiny today. According to **John Metcalfe**, VP of PowerVR Business Development at Imagination Technologies (formerly VideoLogic), "DC is very similar in performance to PS2, but I believe it offers two key benefits: it's much cheaper to make than a PS2, and it's relatively easy to program, largely thanks to tiling architecture which enables the main memory to efficiently be used for texture storage, and hardware support for compressed textures, rather than PS2's small on-chip RAM. This meant that developers could achieve stunning visuals with much less effort than on a PS2. Other benefits include translucency sorting, which takes a big problem away from developers, and DC's ability to render at 640 x 480 60Hz and send the output to a TV after flicker-filtering, which results in fewer jaggies than a PS2 640 x 240 60Hz field render. Finally, DC also had superior support for the PAL 50Hz format."

As for games, it was the innovative, original releases which became the Triple A titles, not the insipid licences and sequels. Sega studios, heavily influenced by Tokyo fashion and street culture, loaded the



The online version of *NFL2K* introduced American Dreamcast owners to multiplayer Internet gaming. Naturally, it rocked



6. Virtua Tennis (AM3)
Expertly combines authenticity with immediate playability. Lush visuals and loads of great one-player sub-challenges



7. Skies of Arcadia (Overworks)
Another fantastic RPG from Sega. 50 hours plus of non-linear gameplay set in an astonishing cloud kingdom



8. Soul Calibur (Namco)
The beat 'em up that could have made Dreamcast a household name – if only someone had put it in the TV ads...



9. Shenmue (AM2)
Possibly the most ambitious videogame ever created. Subtle in detail yet epic in scope; an experience more than a game



10. Sonic Adventure (Sonic Team)
Excellent level design and features win out over the dodgy camera work. Keep a VM handy for Chao breeding



The Dreamcast home development scene is still going and has yet to be eclipsed by PS2 activity

software catalogue with offbeat aural/visual experiences like *Space Channel 5* and *Jet Set Radio*. Other Japanese developers got taken along for the ride – whoever saw SNK's manic rhythm action romp *Cool Cool Toon* coming? Even stock genres were twisted up and re-invented. The key driving games were the free-roamin' cabby sim *Crazy Taxi* and the scarily realistic *F355 Challenge* with its in-depth tutorials and coin-op/console interchange (via VM). One of the best beat 'em ups turned out to be Capcom's *Powerstone*, a frantic, weapon-filled fiesta that completely redefined the term 3D fighting game. Of course, in a perverse way, this was all part of the problem. Try telling Sony's twentysomething, Carhaart-wearing, games-session-after-the-pub mass audience that they should be shaking maracas rather than forking out for the latest *FIFA* title.

The Resistance

Still, there's little doubt Sega enjoys the most dedicated and outspoken 'hardcore' following of any console manufacturer to date. Even before Dreamcast was released, there were dozens of Web sites dedicated to the machine, feeding off scraps of information drifting in from the East. But it was in the many forums and newsgroups

Capturing the heart of the critical *Zeitgeist*, at least in Europe, was UK Resistance. It was here that that the Sega cognoscenti gathered to discuss the burning issues of the day





The Dreamcast version of *DOA2*, arguably superior to the later PS2 port, showed many publishers just how strong Sega's console was. Unfortunately, many had already decided not to back the machine

that Sega-supporters thrived. Some just bitterly and humourlessly attacked Sony, EA, **Edge** and anyone else they perceived as 'anti-Sega' – employing the language and reason of befuddled conspiracy theorists. But elsewhere the scene was self-depreciating, caustic and informed. Underneath the attacks on Sony, there was the knowledge that Sega's worst enemy was Sega itself.

Capturing the heart of this critical *Zeitgeist*, at least in Europe, was UK Resistance – a scurrilous Sega 'news' page with a sense of humour that hovered uneasily between 'Carry On' and 'Private Eye'. It was here that Europe's Sega cognoscenti (gamers, magazine editors, Sega staff) gathered to discuss the burning issues of the day. And, according to the site's author, the key issues were... "The endless delays and comprehensively flawed Kudos system of *Metropolis Street Racer* which made a mockery of what should've been Sega's killer app. *Dead or Alive 2* looking markedly better on Dreamcast and being ignored in the face of the PS2 version. Everything on Dreamcast being ignored in the face of PS2. **Edge** magazine seemingly giving Sega games purposefully low marks. Oh, and the release of *Phantasy Star Online*, which filled all Web forums with endlessly dull PSO threads for a good six months."

Beyond the forums, there was another more creative community hard at work. Through the pioneering fiddlery of console hackers like the Hitmen, a Dreamcast home development scene flourished with dedicated coders creating their own DC games, apps and APIs using homemade serial cables and serial boot discs. These are still active – check out: http://mc.pp.se/dc/ and http://dcdev.allusion.net/.

So what is it that makes pro-Sega activity so prevalent on the Internet? UK Resistance has the answer: "Because Sega fans are losers. The Internet is where losers go. Can you put a winking smiley face after this sentence so they know I'm joking?"

It's not too late

Sega finally conceded defeat in January – and promptly stopped manufacturing Dreamcast. However, many specialist retailers are still stocking units, and there's currently an excellent £99 bundle which includes a VM unit, controller, *Jet Set Radio*, *Virtua Fighter 3tb* and *Metropolis Street Racer*. Watch out also for high street stores selling off their stock at bargain prices, and the usual online auction sites – where a DC should cost between £50-£150 depending on its games complement (although make sure they're original rather than pirated).

The Dreamcast is sure to be remembered as a noble, yet doomed character. In terms of its commercial viability, it was dumped out of the ring some time ago. But for videogame fans across the world, its soul still burns.





The legacy of Dreamcast, which freed Sega's inhouse teams to pursue radical and stylish ideas, lives on in the new multi-format agenda


Ice Cream Cone Networking
(Terraplay, Terraplay)
Marsh Mallow Data Management
(NXN, Alienbrain)
Teddy Bear Modelling
(BioGraphic, ACE)
Smartie AI
(MindLathe, Pensor)
Chocolate Raisin Engine
(Criterion, RenderWare 3)



Middleware: sinner or saviour?

Technology has always driven computer game development forward, but the industry's increasing use of middleware may be setting a worrying precedent. Won't games all end up the same? Edge investigates

"If you go back ten years, the palette of technologies required to develop a game was fairly limited: an animation engine and a sprite engine. Today the palette of technologies required to compete is large. That's why we've had some success with RenderWare," says **Adam Billyard**, Criterion Technologies' spiky-haired director of technology. Some success! It was only a year ago that a similar interview for **Edge** took place at Criterion's Guildford HQ. Back then, the company was tucked away in a nondescript office which, from first impressions at least, looked like an old people's home.

Now Billyard and Criterion Software's president David Lau-Kee sit in their boardroom, around a conference table of such gravity it could be used for Cabinet meetings. The old office remains, but the company has doubled in size and

Photography: Martin Thompson

John Austin



president, NDL

Rik Heywood



technical director, Synaptic Soup

Julian Davis



technical director, Kuju

expanded into the next-door space – a smart Georgian townhouse complete with neat white pillars and a portico. Outside, workmen are completing renovations. The smell of new paint and success is in the air. By the end of 2001, 55 games developed using Criterion's technology will have shipped, with another 100-odd to follow next year. Middleware, once a dirty word, has finally come of age – and Criterion is visible proof of its efficacy.

Squaring the technology circle

Conceptually, middleware is any technology a developer buys to plug the gaps between the game designer's idea and the programmers' expertise. But it's growing importance in the industry has prompted angry debate, particularly among critics, who see it as a creative 'dumbing down' of the worst order. "Middleware is not as powerful as tools specifically created for an individual game," they argue. "It's also over-priced and restrictive to use." "Nonsense," retort its proponents. "Middleware heralds nothing less than a renaissance in computer games. Because of middleware, technology – which has up to now been the driving force for games – is declining in importance. Gameplay is rising to take its place." For such acolytes, middleware has become a new *modus operandi* for games development.

"It's not so long ago that you saw bullet points on the back of computer game boxes which said things like, 'Full dynamic texture-mapped Gouraud-shaded polygons'," Adam Billyard laughs. "No one in their right mind would try and sell you a game based on technology now. Some of the old school programmers will always code their own engines, of course, but we've got to the point where it's not about how many polygons you can get on screen. It's whether or not you have a fun title. There are an awful lot of shit games out there and I think it's because people got carried away with the technology."

Technology has always been an emotional issue for developers, particularly those based in the UK. The limitations inherent in creating games that would fit on a cassette and run in 48K of RAM meant that coding finesse became more valued than the game itself. And as the early bedroom coders formed studios such as Codemasters and Argonaut, that attitude became ingrained throughout the industry. Internally-developed game engines were given fancy names, while lead programmers found themselves in charge of the development process. To be taken seriously, a developer was even expected to code all its game creation tools in-house. It's a mentality which has only recently started to recede. The feeling remains, however, that as with George Bernard Shaw's famous dictum, so with game technology; those that can, do. Those that can't, use middleware.

"In the type of games that we produce, the quality of the gameplay experience is directly proportional to the graphical performance," explains **Steve Ellis**, head of software at Free Radical Design. "Quite simply, a lower frame-rate results in a lower quality game. In order to achieve high performance, it's critical that your data structures are designed giving thought to how the data will be used by your game. Since there is no generic solution to this, middleware engines will never be able to offer the same level of performance as a custom-built engine."

Julian Davis, technical director at Kuju, concurs. "You can only get the best results by customising your engine for the game you're trying to write," he says. "As an example, we have a custom terrain system on PlayStation2 which can draw over 30 million triangles a second. It has a texture manager designed specifically for it, which streams data from the DVD



No, Criterion's *BurnOut* may not be up to the standards of *Gran Turismo 3* in the visual department, but the gameplay is just as captivating and the sensation of speed even greater

Because of middleware, technology – **which has up to now been the driving force for games** – is declining in importance. Gameplay is rising to take its place

Calculating the cost

A basic rendering engine, such as NDL's NetImmerse, is priced at around $250,000 depending on the level of support and updates required. Less well-known engines, such as Synaptic Soup's Cipher and Vulpine's Vision, can be gained for around half this, but as yet these aren't truly crossplatform, because they do not support PlayStation2 and GameCube. Real cheapskates could select Criterion's RenderWare 3 engine, which is reputed to cost a mere $1,000 per seat, per year, per platform. This only gets you one CD per person, though, without any support or updates. Developers working on high-end games or massively multiplayer titles might also be keen on shelling out for Hybrid's dynamic Potentially Visible Set (dPVS) technology. The cost is around $25,000.

Stiff competition between MathEngine and Havok in the physics API market has helped keep prices low, so it should be possible to negotiate a fee of under $50,000. The relatively untried AI middleware from MindLathe and BioGraphics should be even cheaper. Crossplatform networking is another new area, but with a business model currently focused on selling servers to ISPs, developers get the SDK free. Vendors include Proksim and Terraplay.

Sound tools are generally free, too. Dolby, Sensaura, QSound and Creative are keen to sell their technology brands to audio chip manufacturers and consumers and so should be open to developers who make full use of their technology. In contrast, Radgame Tools charges $4,000 per title, per platform for use of its PC-based Miles audio API.

The well-heeled might prefer to just buy the best and not have to worry about the integration issues. All-in-one game engines, such as Quake, Unreal Warfare and LithTech, are obviously far more expensive but as well as technology your title gets marketing prestige. Prices start somewhere between $250,000 and $500,000 and rise, depending on platforms, support, updates and choice of royalty scheme. Criterion's RenderWare platform is another alternative which enables developers to pick and choose from an integrated technology basket including the RenderWare3 engine, Hybrid's dPVS, Sensaura's 3D audio, either MetroWerks' CodeWarrior or SN Systems' development environment and an as-yet-unannounced physics solution. Total cost depends on the options package but starts from around $200,000.





Titles as diverse as *Rayman 2* and *Pro Evolution Soccer* used RenderWare to great effect

Five myths of middleware dissected

1: All games made using middleware look the same

"I think this has always been a spurious argument," says Criterion's Adam Billyard. "You could tell Quake and Unreal games in their previous incarnation, partly because the limited modelling tools meant everything was fairly blocky. They also look the same because everyone uses QERadiant to create the lightmaps. Once a developer decides it's going to do its own lighting or use a custom pipeline to do lighting, games don't look the same. For N games out there using RenderWare, there are N ways to implement lighting."

2: Middleware reduces technological risk

"I'm not convinced that the risk is lower," reckons Free Radical Design's Steve Ellis. "Inevitably, if you're using someone else's engine, at some point you will want to do something with it that the developers didn't think about, and therefore didn't support in their code. When this happens, you either have to try to get some technical support from the developers – hopefully they will answer the phone – or try to work around the problem yourself. This may involve reverse-engineering the middleware engine. A slow and painful process."

3: Middleware means developers don't have to worry about technology

"The main reason we chose to use middleware was to focus on gameplay, but I think it would be naive of any developer to believe that this choice ensures they don't have to worry about technology," says Headfirst's **Chris Gray**. "Although NetImmerse provides us with a strong foundation, we"ve still done a lot of our own hard work."

4: Middleware rendering engines aren't as powerful as custom-engineered engines

"Assuming the custom-engineered engine is written by people who know what they're doing and understand the platform, then I'd agree," says Kuju's Julian Davis. "Middleware has to be a general solution to a problem. The perfect solution for one problem will be completely wrong for another."

5: Studios that use middleware are second-rate compared to those which develop their own technology

"I don't think anyone would try and claim that games such as *Half-Life* or *Deus Ex* are second-rate games, or the developers that created them are second-rate studios," says Synaptic Soup's technical director, **Rik Heywood**. "The studio's licensing technology is invariably producing games with far deeper and more compelling gameplay that other studios', simply because it can devote all its efforts to doing exactly that."

drive. A large part of the engine is built around these capabilities. This system would probably never have been built if we were running on top of middleware. Not because it couldn't work with it, but we would've been less likely to have the expertise required and we might have found it easier to go another route."

A different viewpoint is proposed by **Jeff Wofford**, project lead on an as-yet announced game at Deep Red. "Way too many programmers I encounter are still trying to prove they can be as great as John Carmack," he warns. "Frankly, rendering technology is – relatively speaking – a known problem." Having evaluated rendering and physics engines for use in Deep Red's *Thunderbirds* game, Wofford feels that middleware releases programmers from the drudgery of reinventing the wheel, enabling them to focus on other areas.

"Most of the titles I see that are using RenderWare or NetImmerse are pushing the technological envelope, but they're pushing it only where necessary," he says. "They're focusing on a few, crucial technologies that make their particular game sing. Let's face it, writing a low-level rendering engine is just not that interesting anymore – except, perhaps, to programmers who haven't done it six or eight times. But creating a state-of-the-art animation engine with exhaustive blending capabilities and inverse kinematics, now that's interesting."

"Games are driven by the use of technology," says Criterion's **David Lau-Kee**. "What matters is how you use technology, not who invented it, and I think developers are becoming much more aware of that. What the games market is looking for is concepts that can appeal to the massmarket. This is about the use of technology, not technology itself. Middleware provides a springboard. It's not the end of development; it's the beginning."

Engines ready

One of the bellweather titles in this regard is Oddworld Inhabitants' *Munch's Oddysee*. The studio was set up by special effects and computer animation veterans, Lorne Lanning and Sherry McKenna, who by definition did not have experience of game development. What they did have, however, was a vision for the games they wanted to make. So when they decided to make the move into three dimensions for *Munch's Oddysee*, there was never any question that Oddworld would buy in a middleware engine. Starting off with Epic's Unreal engine, Oddworld then switched to NDL's NetImmerse.

"Oddworld is primarily an art-driven company," says NDL's president **John Austin**. "It's a great example of a company that created 2D games but which needed to lever itself into the 3D world. Obviously, the game started out on PlayStation2, and then it was decided to make the switch to Xbox. One of the reasons Oddworld made that switch so quickly and successfully was because it built on top of an engine that supported both platforms. Oddworld didn't have to rip out platform-specific code in order to port the game."

"Artists like Lorne Lanning and Gabe Newell are entering the pantheon of 'gaming gods' by pushing our ideas of gameplay, interactivity and character in games," agrees Jeff Wofford. "If the game is great, nobody cares how it got great. If *Munch's Oddysee* ships and is a great release, everyone will want to work for Oddworld Inhabitants. It won't matter where the technology came from. It frankly doesn't matter whether we think developing technology is macho or not.



Munch's Oddysee is looking stunning after receiving the NetImmerse treatment



NDL's NetImmerse is more popular in the States but it is now gathering pace in the UK

Jeff Wofford



project lead, Deep Red

Adam Billyard



director of technology, Criterion Technologies

David Lau-Kee



president, Criterion Software

Enabling independent development

Minds Eye and Headfirst are two small UK developers relying on middleware to create their next generation games. Both are working on licence-based games. Birmingham-based Headfirst has the H. P. Lovecraft-inspired *Call of Cthulhu* and anime-favourite *Battle of the Planets* on the go, and is using the NetImmerse rendering engine, together with Havok's physics code. Milton Keynes-based Minds Eye is developing a *Starsky and Hutch* driving game using RenderWare and Havok.

1: Why are you using middleware?

Chris Gray, Headfirst

"Not only did NetImmerse provide us with a headstart on our project, it also enabled easier porting to other platforms should it be required. We could have potentially developed our own 3D engine internally, but much of the functionality is already well established and there seemed to be little point in reinventing the wheel."

Kevin Cook, Minds Eye

"First, we wanted to hit the floor running. To write in-house rendering and physics systems would have taken months of development and greatly delayed work on the game. Second, at the time, we had little or no experience with the PlayStation2 and Xbox. Having a renderer which is already written for both these and the PC gave us a great headstart."

2: Is using middleware as easy as you hoped?

Chris Gray, Headfirst

"There were initial teething problems, but our programming team are now well-versed using NetImmerse. It's well documented and the open source makes understanding the technology significantly easier. It's also fair to say that their engine has improved dramatically over the years."

Kevin Cook, Minds Eye

"Both engines have surpassed my early expectations. For example, we put together a pile of cardboard boxes in a street, pass Havok the geometry describing the boxes' shape and position, rotation, mass and friction. Then we can drive a car through them and Havok does everything for us."

3: Do you think middleware is affordable for smaller developers?

Chris Gray, Headfirst

"The financial decision will obviously vary between companies, and the resources you can immediately access. If you have several experienced low-level programmers then it would probably make more sense to develop your own engine. In our case it made more sense to buy in the technology."

Kevin Cook, Minds Eye

"The RenderWare and Havok engines have had teams of people with vast experience developing them over a long period of time. It can be quite difficult for small developers to set aside teams of programmers for long enough to create something as polished and stable."

Macho doesn't put bread on the table."

Middleware can also help in times of crisis, as DMA Design, which used RenderWare for *Grand Theft Auto 3*, can testify. Although the first two *GTA* games were 2D, DMA had plenty of in-house 3D expertise to draw on, having released games such as *Wild Metal Country* and *Body Harvest*. But when most of the staff left, following Take Two's relocation of the studio from Dundee to Edinburgh, middleware was required to bring the team up to speed.

Waiting 12 months for the development of a game engine and tools wasn't an option. As Adam Billyard eloquently puts it, "Shit happens when you're developing computer games and anything you can do to reduce risk and save time has got to be a good thing. We have a fluid industry and people move around. In a sense, if a studio's engine team goes walkies, that's great for us."

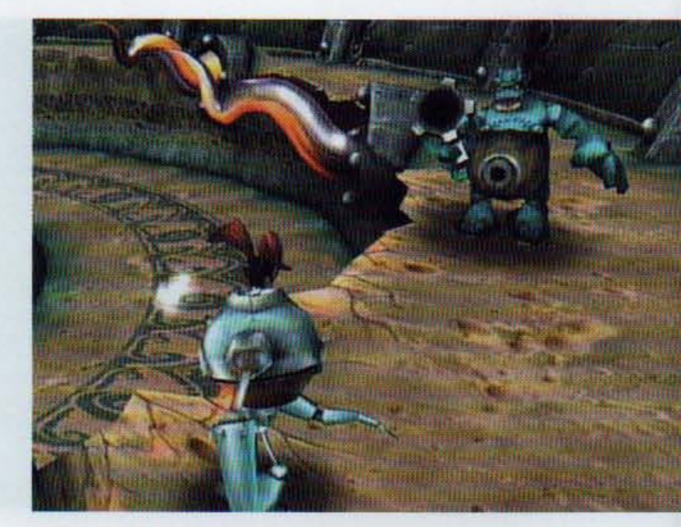
From the middle onwards

Rather surprisingly, middleware's acceptance within the industry has little to do with technology *per se*. It needs to be of a certain standard to be useful, of course, but its rapid takeup is more symptomatic of the new rules of game development. At this point in the games industry cycle, publishers view exclusive content as a broken flush. If Sony, Nintendo or Microsoft want to pay for a title to be an exclusive, that's great, but publishers certainly don't rely on this. And with development budgets and timescale for triple-A games pushing the $2 million and 18 months barriers respectively, anything which reduces the uncertainty of development while increasing the number of platforms it's possible to release product on becomes a 'no-brainer'. If a publisher doesn't want to release a title on more than two platforms, at the very least middleware provides a choice as to which of the two platforms is delayed.





BioGraphic's character engine plugs into Maya, while *Airblade* uses RenderWare



Zoink's Core uses the versatile Virtools engine and is just one of many games being developed using off-the-peg technology. But will the widespread use of middleware encourage innovation?

"Some of the big publishers are saying, 'Our team are a bright bunch and it took them 18 months to develop this engine. We're not doing that again.' They can create their own engines but it's not worth them doing it," says Adam Billyard. It's a fact underlined by the presence of heavyweights such as Konami, Midway and THQ on RenderWare's clients list. Even the likes of EA has quietly signed middleware deals. It's using Finnish technology vendor Hybrid's SurRender engine for *C&C: Renegade*, while there are plenty of other developers and publishers who never publicly announce that their titles use middleware.

> "Shit happens when you're developing computer games and **anything you can do to reduce risk and save time** has got to be a good thing..."

The technology market continues to expand in this respect, with an enormous range of middleware on the production line. Disparate 'middle'-companies are already offering artificial intelligence, audio, 3D audio, physics, networking, data management and protection, programming, 3D web engines, facial scanning and representation, font rendering, wireless connectivity, virtual Java and optimising visualisation tools for the discerning developer. Frankly, the range is becoming bewildering.

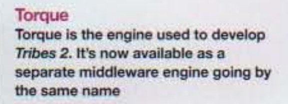
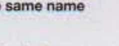
No matter what the arguments for and against, middleware is here to stay. What's now crucial is whether developers and publishers will use it to focus on new creative approaches or to turn out licences and sequels with terminal regularity. Even as a supporter of middleware, Jeff Wofford cautions developers that it will have an enormous effect on them. "Middleware usage is becoming the rule, not the exception – but I'm suggesting developers ease themselves into middleware. The more middleware you use, the more of an atom bomb it is in your company," he says. "Developers need to be preparing themselves for a fundamental adjustment in the way they think about development. Middleware changes your budgeting, your schedule, your featureset and your platform portability. That's what I mean when I say it's an atom bomb. We cannot underestimate its impact to projects or developers."

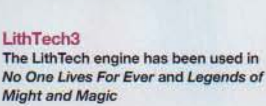
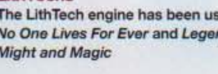
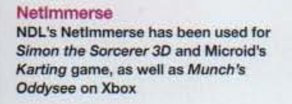
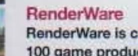
Middleware: the complete list

Rendering and game engines

Criterion, RenderWare3
NDL, NetImmerse4
Intrinsic, Alchemy
Virtools, Virtools2
4X Technologies, Phoenix
id, Quake4
Epic, Unreal Warfare
LithTech, LithTech3
Synaptic Soup, Cipher
Vulpine, Vision
GarageGames, Torque



Torque
Torque is the engine used to develop *Tribes 2*. It's now available as a separate middleware engine going by the same name

Virtools2
Virtools' engine is being used in the *Zoink's Core* game, as well as simple 3D web games such as *Volcano Racer*

Vision
Vulpine's Vision PC engine demonstrates its pixel lighting effects

Phoenix
4x Technologies' engine is being used in In Uteros' *Evil Twin* game

Alchemy
Both these screens are from a demo for Intrinsic's Alchemy engine

Cipher
Synaptic Soup's Cipher engine is being used in its *Crazy Car Championship* game. The demo shows per-pixel lighting and shadow effects

LithTech3
The LithTech engine has been used in *No One Lives For Ever* and *Legends of Might and Magic*

NetImmerse
NDL's NetImmerse has been used for *Simon the Sorcerer 3D* and Microid's *Karting* game, as well as *Munch's Oddysee* on Xbox

Quake
The Quake engine as used in *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* and *Jedi Knights 2*

RenderWare
RenderWare is currently in use in over 100 game productions. Recent titles include *Airblade* and *Burnout*, DMA's *GTA3*, UbiSoft's *Rayman 2 Revolution* and Konami's *Winning 11 5*

Unreal Warfare
Epic's Unreal Warfare engine as shown by *Unreal Championship* on PS2

Optimising visualisation tools

Hybrid, dPVS

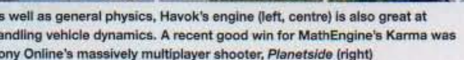



Hybrid's dynamic Potential Visible Set technology (left) enables developers to optimise their scene rendering. One of the first games to use Hybrid's dPVS is Elixir's *Republic* (right)

Physics

MathEngine, Karma
Havok, Havok



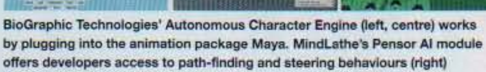


As well as general physics, Havok's engine (left, centre) is also great at handling vehicle dynamics. A recent good win for MathEngine's Karma was Sony Online's massively multiplayer shooter, *Planetside* (right)

AI

MindLathe, Pensor
BioGraphic Technologies, ACE



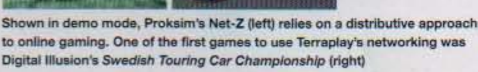


BioGraphic Technologies' Autonomous Character Engine (left, centre) works by plugging into the animation package Maya. MindLathe's Pensor AI module offers developers access to path-finding and steering behaviours (right)

Networking

Proksim, Net-Z
Terraplay, Terraplay

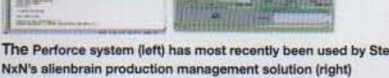




Shown in demo mode, Proksim's Net-Z (left) relies on a distributive approach to online gaming. One of the first games to use Terraplay's networking was Digital Illusion's *Swedish Touring Car Championship* (right)

Data management and protection

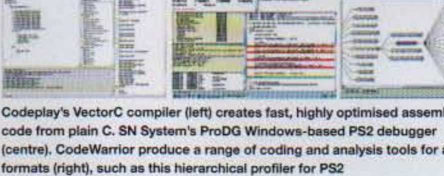
Perforce, Perforce
NXN, alienbrain

The Perforce system (left) has most recently been used by Steel Monkeys. NxN's alienbrain production management solution (right)

Programming

Metrowerks, CodeWarrior
SN Systems, ProDG
Codeplay, VectorC

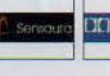



Codeplay's VectorC compiler (left) creates fast, highly optimised assembly code from plain C. SN System's ProDG Windows-based PS2 debugger (centre). CodeWarrior produce a range of coding and analysis tools for all formats (right), such as this hierarchical profiler for PS2

Audio

Radgametools, Miles
Sensaura, 3D Positional Audio
Dolby, Dolby 5.1, Surround and Digital
Creative, EAX
QSound, QMixer
Analog, soundMAX












Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Broadly speaking, scores correspond to the following sentiments: one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Videogames on the **Edge**

This month's unanimous choices...

Burnout

The adrenaline meter is a tremendously well thought out design element encouraging gamers to play chicken with on-coming traffic. Do try this at home.



(PS2) Acclaim

Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time

For no reason other than to once again savour the views over Hyrule Field, **Edge** dusted off its cartridge and relived some very, very happy gaming memories.



(N64) Nintendo

Shenmue

In eager anticipation of the advanced crate-stacking and blossom-blocking trance action of the sequel, **Edge** once again consorted with sailors and kittens.



(DC) Sega

Space Channel 5

This month's *SC5 Part 2* and the astounding *Rez* got **Edge** thinking about UGA's overlooked rhythm actioner. Imagine, then, the joy of finding it for £10.



(DC) Sega

A perfect ten

Xbox scores a direct hit, first go

It's called Testscreen Intro for a reason, but this month perhaps it'd be better as a postscript. Presuming you haven't already, you have **Edge**'s permission to skip ahead, and come back when you're done. Please. **Edge** insists.

Edge's scoring system – designed around the revolutionary principle that a game worth a six is above average, and shouldn't be instantly discarded – has always been a subject of contention and pride. It's also a substantial part of the reason **Edge** is labelled a misanthrope, or a miserablist, or just misguided. **Edge** is none of those things. One-hundred-and-four issues from the start, only *Mario 64*, *Gran Turismo*, and *Ocarina of Time* had scored that maximum ten. One-hundred-and-five issues in, and there's another.

Edge always suspected *Halo* was going to be good, but good is a seven, and *Halo* is not a seven. It is the most consuming, overwhelming, coherent videogame **Edge** has played for years. The decision to give it ten wasn't taken lightly, but swiftly proved inevitable. When a game comes along that warrants that mark, you know. It's electric; feels like so much more than the sum of its parts; takes your words away. You can just feel it.

But, even without *Halo*, this is an exceptional month. So much so, in fact, that it seems slightly unfortunate, unfair. In a normal issue, any of *Rez*, *Civ III*, *Pikmin*, *Jak and Daxter*, *Oddworld*, or *Project Gotham* could have led the reviews section and competed for **Edge**'s small amount of leisure time. But they've had their thunder stolen by *Halo*, and this isn't a normal issue. It's the best issue of reviews in **Edge**'s history. No question.

Rest assured, though, that the run of top marks in **E**105 doesn't indicate a relaxing of **Edge**'s review policy, or (necessarily) herald a constant stream of eights, nines, and tens in subsequent issues. Consistently marking lower than other magazines gives **Edge** somewhere to go when really astonishing games arrive for review. Next month, *Metal Gear Solid 2*, *Rogue Leader*, *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* and *Dead Or Alive 3* are all scheduled to make an appearance, four titles whose importance to their host format is matched only by their hype and **Edge**'s anticipation. It's an exciting time. For now, though, the **Edge** office rings out to singleplayer shrieks and multiplayer sulking, to *Halo*'s human soundtrack. The postscript ends here. **Edge** hopes it's only the beginning.







066

070



072

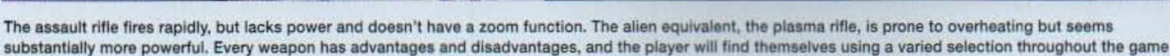


074

Halo

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Bungie** Price: **$50 (£40)** Release: **Out now (US) March 14 (UK)**





The assault rifle fires rapidly, but lacks power and doesn't have a zoom function. The alien equivalent, the plasma rifle, is prone to overheating but seems substantially more powerful. Every weapon has advantages and disadvantages, and the player will find themselves using a varied selection throughout the game

Cynics smiled and shook their heads; it was so logical, so Microsoft. Everyone knows that there are strictly defined genres within gaming, that there are fans of each of those genres, and so, to please all of those fans – or at least to get them interested in your machine – you need to bring out a game in their genre. It's a sensible, checklist approach to the launch of a new console. Put a tick in every box, and make sure you've got everyone's attention. And that was what Microsoft appeared to be doing.

It didn't really come as much surprise when they snatched *Halo*, a game the FPS community had been hailing as if it were the second coming of Gordon Freeman, from the bleeding hearts of PC gamers and into their carefully balanced starting line-up. It was an intelligent play for the hearts of people who'd never considered console gaming, except then, of course, came the rumours of missed deadlines and a reduced feature set. Online play, a huge selling point on the PC was dropped completely. It was all going wrong. Cynics smiled and shook their heads. So predictable. So Microsoft.

So it arrives. And, after forty hours of expletive-filled single-player immersion and countless more in multiplayer, **Edge** is left with a problem. Not because of issues with the game, and only partially because it's difficult to find the words to do Bungie's work justice. The problem arises because you can't review *Halo* without talking about some of the moments that make it, and you can't talk about those moments without spoiling it for those who deserve to experience them afresh, just like you did. It's the sort of game that demands you enthuse about the situations you've found yourself in, but you can't… "And what about the bit in level two, when…" – "And then when you get in the…" – "And when you discover you can…" – "And when the enemies first…" You can't.

So what can you talk about? Well, you can discuss how *Halo* starts, with the player taking the role of Chief, a newly defrosted super-soldier on board a ship under attack from a warring alien race. Induction takes a few minutes; thereafter, the action is relentless. There are ten chapters, each subdivided into several captioned objective-based missions. Thematically, the game's

While fighting can be frantic, it always possesses some measure of subtlety. There's a smarter way out than just joining the fray

Previously in E77/E79/E97/E99









Bigger enemies have shielding which crackles with every hit. Once it's disabled, their behaviour state appears to alter. Some charge towards the player for mêlée combat, while others flee in terror





Lighting, shadowing, and reflections are all handled beautifully, while tone and colour are substantially different to standard FPS greys

roots are in standard sci-fi, in alien xenophobia, triumph and betrayal: one man against the odds. Except, for much of *Halo*'s epic adventure, you're not alone.

You can talk about the single-player team play. Chief's travels around *Halo*'s world bring him into contact with pockets of marines, often under heavy enemy fire. If the player manages to keep them alive, they'll fight with him. If he fails they become just another source of weaponry. And you can talk about the weapons, too; in a surprising concession to realism, Chief can only carry two at once, which means that, since almost every enemy carries some kind of weapon, every dead body provides another decision. Those decisions don't just affect how quickly the player progresses through the next part of the game, but also how the next part of the game plays. Firing on an enemy camp with an assault rifle is significantly different to sniping a perimeter gunner and stealing his turret, and sneaking round dispatching sleeping aliens with stealthy combat is different again.

You can talk about the weapons' balance; the *Doom* ethic that pervades the genre, where the pistol is sequentially replaced in usefulness by the shotgun and then the chain-gun and so on, is absent. For example, the pistol, the first weapon Chief receives in the game, is invaluable throughout. Some players will prefer it to everything else available, but they will be forced to change when they run out of ammunition, or when they perceive a situation demands a change of tactics. Thanks to the cascading AI, changing tactics results in different situations. Changing tactics changes the game.

You can talk about how the combat works. Chief's status meter consists of a shield bar which starts recharging moments after the player has stopped taking damage, and six units of health, which don't. On any difficulty level higher than easy, standard FPS close-combat reaction-test tactics will fail. Using the surroundings to provide cover for the moments it takes for the shield to recharge is vital, and every yard of every environment appears to have been designed with that in mind. While fighting can be frantic, it always possesses some measure of subtlety. There's a smarter way out than just joining the fray.



Outside moments are placed in a frame of reference by the always-visible planet structure



Saving grace

Rather than employing the traditional console route of save points, or even aping the PC's poisonous quicksave structure, *Halo* features checkpoints before and after significant moments in the game. Saving is automatic, and goes almost unnoticed; post-death reloading is also automatic, and instantaneous. Because the position and behaviour of enemies is different on each reload, the prescience that the ability to save usually gives the player is vastly reduced. Once a chapter is completed, it's unlocked on the level select menu.



Direct hits on enemy vehicles are often enough to send the drivers flying. If the vehicle isn't damaged too badly, it might be possible to steal it. In this case, following a double hit with a rocket launcher, it isn't

You can talk, briefly, about co-operative play. Player one draws the vehicle's fire, while player two picks off the pilot with the sniper rifle. Player one drains an enemy's shield with an alien pistol, allowing player two to flank and get a clean shot with the shotgun. Player one uses a grenade to scatter the opponents down a corridor and towards player two's rocket launcher. Tactics are planned and improvised. They arise from situations unimagined by the programmers or players, situations created by the game's spectacular artificial intelligence.

This is exactly what Microsoft needed. This is not hyperbole: this is the most important launch game for any console, ever

You can talk about that AI. It's outstanding on the normal setting, but on the hardest of the four difficulty levels, it is absolutely terrifying. Enemies will do everything you expect a human player to, and if there's a single testament to its genius, it's that it constantly creates situations similar to *Half-Life*'s best set-pieces. And then, on your second run through the game, those situations will be different because even if you behave exactly the same, even if you use the same weapons and fire in exactly the same places, the positioning and reaction of the enemies is randomised.



Zoom functions on both the pistol and the sniper rifle provide centre-screen clarity combined with blurred peripheral vision



Parking the jeep by AI-controlled soldiers is enough to let them know you want them to get in. Each has a visible health meter, and should the gunner fall to enemy fire, you'll be reduced to playing hit and run

And, thankfully, you can talk about the multiplayer. List the box stats, if you want: Fourplayer splitscreen, 13 arenas, 26 different types of game and the opportunity to define the terms of combat yourself. Network multiple Xboxes and the number of conceivable fighters rises to 16, or four, each with their own machine, or eight split into four teams of two, or however you choose to define it. But the subtlety of the control and the balance of the weapons make it so much more than a list of numbers. *GoldenEye* was the standard for multiplayer console combat. It has been surpassed. And the single player? If you knew what happened on the third level, and the fifth, and so on…

That's the problem. You can talk around *Halo* a lot, but you can't talk specifics if you don't want to spoil it for those who want to experience it. And that should be everybody: this is more than **Edge** expected, and exactly what Microsoft needed. This is not hyperbole: this is the most important launch game for any console, ever. It doesn't mean the XBox will succeed, but it does mean that if it fails, it will leave videogaming with one perfect, eloquently coded moment. That's it. That's all you can say.

Edge rating: **Ten** out of ten







Enemy forces are often best fought by turning their own weapons against them. Gun turrets provide heavy fire, but render the player completely static and an easy target, particularly for deadly plasma grenades











Dropships provide additional infantry and heavy gunfire for both you and the enemy. Well thrown grenades can cause havoc when they land

Backing vocals

While it's an oft-overlooked feature in the first person shooter genre – how many times can you say how great the sniper rifle sounds? *Halo*'s sound effects bear further examination. The soundtrack is fantastic, but the real greatness comes from the sheer number of vocal effects used. Each marine has several for each recognised action, so battles become a cacophony of panicked yells and victory cries.

It doesn't just give you an idea of what's going on, but it also adds to the feeling of involvement: they praise good sniping, scream for downed comrades, and shout abuse at enemy corpses.

Oddworld: Munch's Oddysee

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Oddworld Inhabitants** Price: **$50 (£40)** Release: **Out now (US) March 14 (UK)**







While co-ordination is important for the more arcade-style sections, combat has a more thoughtful approach, with the AI doing much of the fighting for you

The transition to next-gen systems for stitch-lipped Abe was always going to be more visible than most franchise heads, thanks to Oddworld's 2D PlayStation aesthetic. Less obvious was the torturous route taken by Lorne Lanning and his crew to bring the three-dimensional Mudoken to life. The decision to switch development at the last minute away from PlayStation2 and on to Xbox may have been eased by a cash injection from Microsoft, but it can't have been pleasant.

Regardless, Abe's here, and this time he's accompanied by new cohort Munch, a one-legged piscine coward, and sole survivor of an unfortunately tasty race. Fate forces them to team up and rescue their unborn relatives from the evil Sligs by utilising their specific (and different) skills. Abe can lead and order his fellow Mudokens, and, with the aid of the generously distributed Spooce (collectible fruit), psychically possess enemies. Munch can swim, use remote controls to direct vehicles, and release and command imprisoned aggressive furballs, also captured by the Sligs. More abilities are revealed as the game progresses, and therein lies the structure: it's a puzzle game where the rules, and thus the solutions, increase in complexity level by level.

Initially, control of the characters feels lightweight, and lacks subtlety. The camera, almost predictably, is often irritating. It's on rails much of the time, switching to a straight side on view for some of the more straight platforming elements, but, while it can always be moved, control of it is via the D-pad, and since each character is controlled with the left analogue stick, switching the viewpoint means letting go of the controls for a minute to reposition. There's a snap-to control, too, but it's the white face button, also awkwardly positioned for quick alterations.

The draw distance isn't as good as



Stone circles may provide help with new abilities, but the guide rarely gives away puzzle solutions



players of *Amped* and *Halo* will have come to expect, but it never impinges on the sense of reality, and only fractionally on the splendour. The places Munch and Abe explore aren't stunning, but suffice; still, if the environments are pleasant but unspectacular, then the character design borders on genius. Abe and Munch are superbly realised, as are the supporting cast. Surprisingly, the inter-level CGI cut-scenes are delivered and produced so well that they genuinely serve as a reward. In fact, sometimes they're more entertaining than the game.

The problem is with the pacing. While different abilities and conceivable solutions are brought in, they're introduced slowly, and the game can feel laborious. Puzzle solutions, while rarely obscure, sometimes fall victim to control issues or the stupidity of Abe's Mudoken colleagues. Despite your in-game guide telling you not to worry, and assuring you they'll act with some degree of intelligence – simple things like returning fire when under attack and so on – they turn out to be much, much stupider than *Ico*'s oft-vilified accomplice, Yorda.

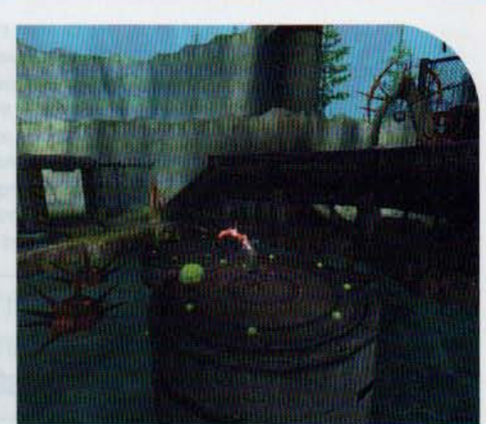
But perhaps, if you were being kind, you could say that that adds to the atmosphere. Lanning's team have produced a world that's utterly convincing, but not completely compelling. This is Sunday afternoon gaming – play it for a couple of hours every weekend, and it'll entertain for what seems like forever; mainline it and becomes samey, sickening. Perhaps it'd be better as episodic gaming, and as it stands it demands some discipline on the player's part, some determination grind through the game's duller passages. Still, it's a canny acquisition on the part of Microsoft, and while it never really surprises, it's solid, enjoyable, and entertaining.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

Previously in E79/E86/E99











Occasionally Abe must possess enemies in order to further the plot. Here, the Mudoken sends his thoughts to the inside of a brewery, where an evil landlord awaits to unwittingly donate all his cash





This level sees two Mudokens stranded in the middle of a field of bombs. By employing some pure platforming action, Abe can make his way to the other side of the field, where he can detonate the bombs and race across to rescue his pals.The sequence is a fair glimpse of much of the game

The CGI cut-scenes are produced so well that they genuinely serve as a reward. Sometimes they're more entertaining than the game

The problem with puzzles



Munch's Oddysee is defined by its puzzles, which, while complex in appearance, are simple in structure. Really, it's just paper, scissors, stone – enemies kill Abe, but Abe's possession abilities kills enemies, but defensive orbs negate possession – played out on an epic scale. The trick is tracing the chain of problems back to its route, and (usually) the only solution. Take reference points like *Project Eden* or *The Lost Vikings* or *Head Over Heels*, and colour them with the cute stylings and macabre humour that marks the first two outings, and you're most of the way there.

Amped

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£40)** Release: **Out now (US) March 14 (UK)**

It's when the boarder makes the transition from powder to ice that it really hits home. Suddenly you can't cut into the surface anymore – the sound of your board scratching across the ice, the sight of the board slipsliding without grip – but what's really striking is how it feels. Like a simulation, out of control, fighting against contours on instinct, and then you lose it, and your board and rider tumbles, and while you're cursing your own inability it occurs to you: it feels completely right.

The best indication of Microsoft's snowboarding success is that it's just so rewarding to simply play around on the stunning vistas

It feels so right, in fact, that the sensation of speed, and the feeling of triumph when you manage to stay on the board under outrageous circumstance, provoke the desire for an objective a little more intense than freeform loops and spins. This is slacker-chic's interpretation of adrenaline, but that goes with the territory: it'd be churlish to curse the game for not being all-out racing, because *Amped* was never meant to be *SSX* in Xbox clothing. This is the snowboarder's boarding game.

The focus is an epic career mode, which sees the player moving up the world rankings and boosting their character's stats with sparsely allocated skill points, gained by achieving points targets on runs, by squeezing spins and jumps out of natural curves. The trick system is simple, unspectacular, and easily mastered, allowing easy railslides, spins, grabs, and tweaks. The skill comes in judging the most productive route down each recreated mountain, in honing it until you're able to pass whatever challenge you're working on.

Some of each course's jumps have rotating red media icons by them (which, to a small extent at least, is a shame; it's an unreal touch, and subtracts from the world's immersion), illustrating the presence of a photographer, and tricking by them will add to the player's media points total. If they exceed the target amount during a single run, they'll receive some media coverage, which means a short Gilliam-inspired animated sequence detailing their increasing level of recognition.

Other challenges include the sponsor mode, where players can unlock more snowboarding kit by performing enough of a specific type of a trick, and the pro challenges which involve following an AI-controlled boarder's route and attempting to out-perform them on every jump. Each course also hides eight sentient, giggling snowmen for the more adventurous borders to discover and destroy. While deviously placed, they provide an incentive to explore off-piste, and a diversion when the main game gets too frustrating.

While the act of building up your character appears something of a chore at first, as the skill points to improve come slowly and initially appear to have little impact, progress is steady and rewarding. It's a carefully balanced career path, and as another course unlocks or another pro falls, there's a definite sense of achievement. The Quick Start option, naturally, is much more instant, providing multiple pre-built boarders for the impatient powder junkie's delectation.

But really, everyone should find something to devour somewhere in the expansive environments. The best indication of Microsoft's snowboarding success is that it's just so rewarding – so tactile, so responsive – to cut down the mountainside with no set objective at all, to simply play around on the stunning vistas.

A satisfactory blend of realism and entertainment is a difficult thing to achieve, but *Amped* manages it, sitting comfortably between simulation purity and arcade instinct. In essence, it's a beautifully portrayed snow-powder sandbox, and substantially more than the merely 'solid' title most were expecting.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of ten

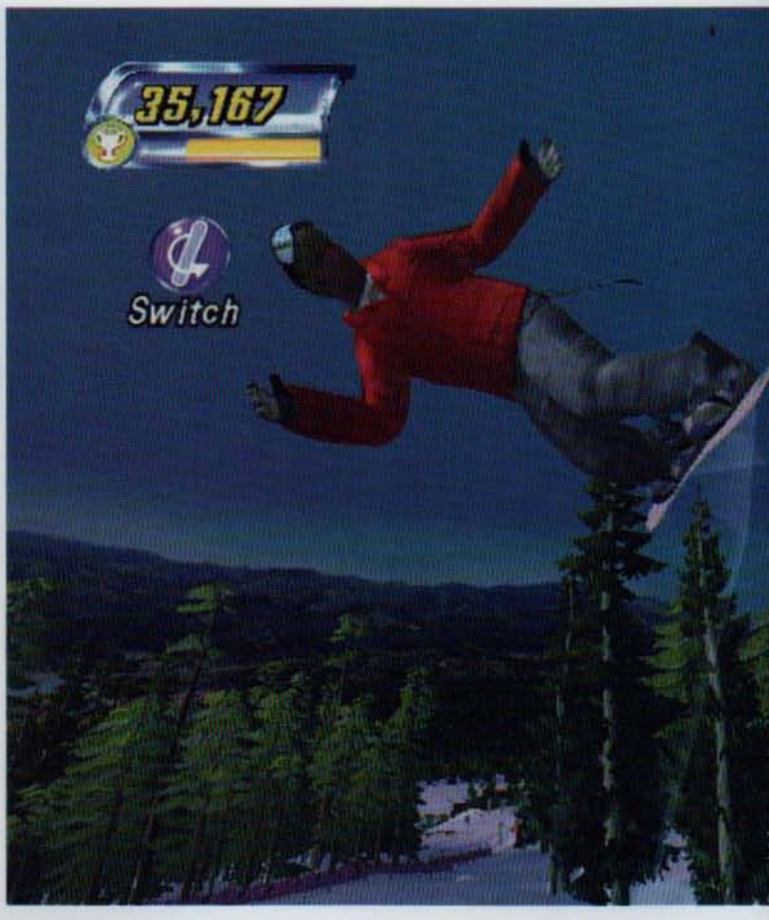








Viewfinder shots indicate that you're tricking near a camera, and that points scored will go on your media total. Pre-race, a display screen shows your status



Successfully jib off a tree – or fail, and just collide with it – and snow will gently rain down. *Amped* might look plain in screenshots, but the beauty is in the small details, and the way it portrays snowboard realism











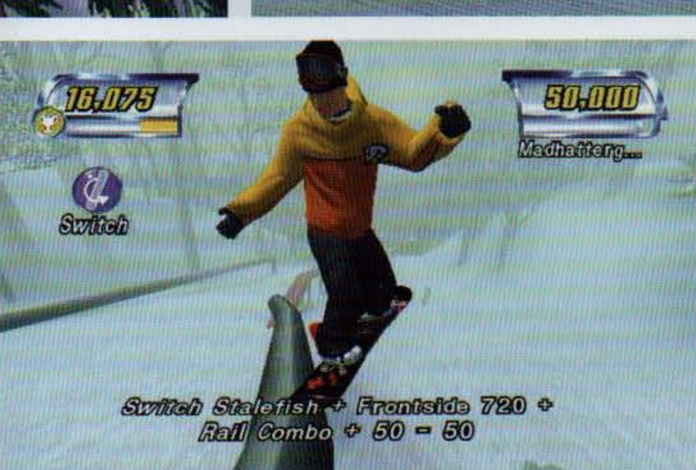








Pro Challenge (top) sees you beating another boarder trick for trick on your way down the slopes. A sparkling green line indicates his path



Railsliding is as simple as pressing the B button, but boarders with low skill points will find it difficult to stay locked to the surface. Combining slides with jumps and grabs gets high scores



Soundscape

Amped's extensive soundtrack contains over 150 songs, subdivided into musical genres. Each genre can be switched on or off at the options screen, affording boarders with a predilection for Emo or a hatred of Ska to tailor the audio to their liking. If that still isn't enough choice, the Xbox's built in MP3 ripper allows users to rip their own CDs to the machine's hard disk, and, once stored, the songs can be employed at will. Cutting down mountainsides to the Get Up Kids is one thing; sweeping across powdered snowscapes to 'Fly Me To The Moon' is quite another.

Rez

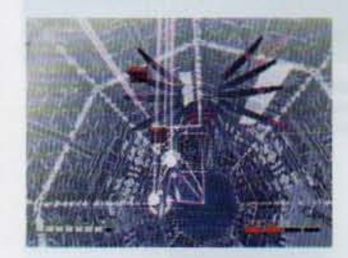
Format: **PlayStation2 (version tested), Dreamcast** Publisher: **SCEE/Sega** Developer: **United Game Artists** Price: **¥6,800 (£38), ¥8,800 with Trance Vibrator unit (£49)**

To describe *Rez* as an old school 3D shoot 'em up is a bit like describing 'Romeo and Juliet' as boy meets girl. It's essentially correct, but fundamentally missing the point. The underlying mechanics are indeed those that have been refined by the likes of *Space Harrier* and *Panzer Dragoon*: defend yourself from wave after wave of attackers before the destruction of a boss

Despite the familiarity of the mechanics, it's a thrillingly revelatory experience; at once both intellectually edifying and viscerally entertaining









From beginning to end, *Rez* is a game that's simply teeming with memorable set pieces, evoking a blistering sense of scale and a bewildering sense of involvement

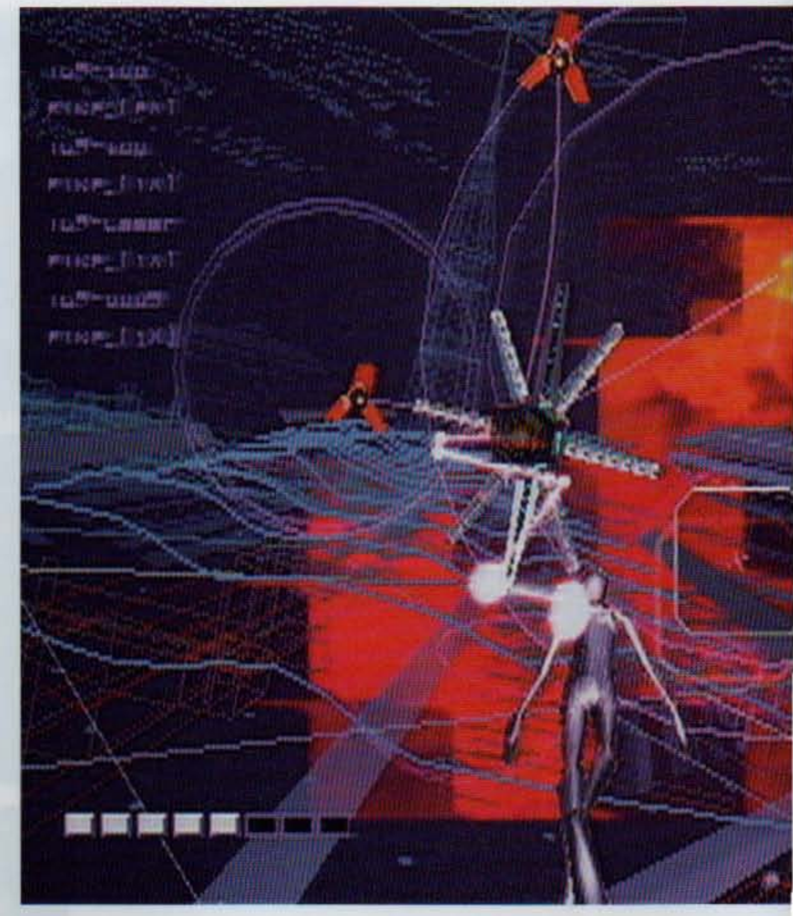
enables you to progress to the next stage. But *Rez* is so much more than this. Tetsuya Mizuguchi's unique synaesthetic vision has engineered an artefact that exhibits a cultural relevance far beyond the ordinary confines of the videogame medium – yet which is also hugely enjoyable to play.

Even judged by the well-worn 3D shoot 'em up formula, *Rez* is immaculate. Taking place inside an unspecified cyberspace, it's the player's task to break through a series of firewalls and save the central AI, Eden, from a virus. Consisting largely of five stages, the game boasts a targeting system that enables you to lock onto multiple adversaries, as well as an overdrive counter that, although limited in number of uses, facilitates the destruction of everything on screen.

Instead of lives, there are seven distinct phases of evolution, with each new mutation activated by collecting power-ups. Receive a single hit, however, and you drop a step back down the evolutionary ladder. Every stage boasts varied attack patterns, a diverse range of foes and some of the most brilliantly conceived end-of-level bosses ever – from the lotus leaf/combination lock fusion of the Mars Giga to the epic transformation of the Uranus Giga into a colossal, running man.

Work of genius

The real joy of *Rez*, though, is in its inimitable amalgamation of sound, vision, action and disembodied narrative. Despite the familiarity of the game mechanics, it's a thrillingly revelatory experience; at once both intellectually edifying and viscerally entertaining. In its appreciation of 3D space and in the way themes of evolution and transcendence are intertwined with, and layered on top of, exhilarating abstract soundscapes, *Rez* is a work of genius. And



Given the wilfully abstract gaming environment, the amount of peripheral ephemera might appear to be confusing, but to a generation well versed in negotiating a variety of videogame spaces, it's not a problem

featuring exclusive tunes from the likes of Japanese combo Joujouka and trancemaster Ken Ishii, seamlessly integrated with the action, it's a collaborative effort, too. Adam Freeland's 'Fear', in particular, provides a harmoniously epic milieu for the final stage of the game, shortly before the HAL-like disintegration of the corrupted Eden which prefaces the endgame sequence.

Quite apart from the evident artistry that has gone into the making of this game, the developer has also put an enormous effort into making sure that it's as comprehensive as it is beautiful. Thanks to a finely balanced suite of unlockable extras, the game rewards repeated and varied play. Trance modes, and Travelling modes are the digital equivalent of a chill-out room, enabling you to play the game with impunity, while a Score Attack mode rewards extravagant risks with high scoring combo multipliers and a consequent adrenaline rush.

It's a shame that the Dreamcast version seems slightly sluggish compared to the PlayStation2 incarnation, but really the differences between the two are cosmetic. Indeed, it's tempting to think that were he alive today, and given a suitable intellectual climate, Kandinsky, to whom the game is dedicated, would have been proud to have worked on either version. Certainly, one of the defining achievements of *Rez* is that although it is a creation with a demonstrable cultural significance, it draws lovingly and resolutely from the videogame canon.

Proof, then that videogames are art? Perhaps. A staggeringly enjoyable experience? Certainly.

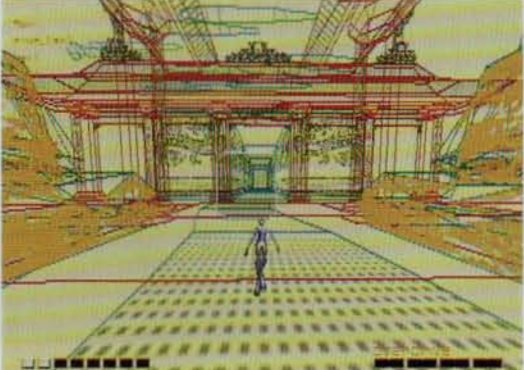
Edge rating: Nine out of ten

Release: Out now (Japan), January 25 2002 (UK)

Previously in E100









Metamorphosing end-of-level bosses, evolving soundscapes, increasingly solid environments, and an onscreen protagonist that gradually transforms into pure energy. Evolution and transcendence are at the heart of *Rez*







Rez contains a host of extra modes to unlock, including a variety of satisfyingly lurid colour schemes (above) and even a little something for dedicated fans of UGA's earlier works (left)



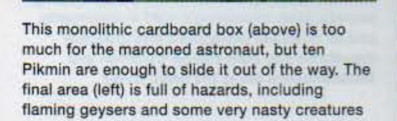
Good vibrations

Pitching DualShock's rumble capacity into the auditory and visual mélange proves hugely successful in immersing players of *Rez* into a suitably trance-like state. But just to make sure, Japanese gamers will be able to buy a copy of the game bundled with ASCII's Trance Vibrator unit, which boasts three to four times the vibrational power of the standard PlayStation2 controller. It remains to be seen whether European gamers will also be able to get their hands on the device, which Mizuguchi-san sees as a compensation for the lack of thumping bass in domestic environments.

Pikmin

Format: **GameCube** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£38)** Release: **Out now (Japan) December 3 (US)**







This monolithic cardboard box (above) is too much for the marooned astronaut, but ten Pikmin are enough to slide it out of the way. The final area (left) is full of hazards, including flaming geysers and some very nasty creatures





Pikmin can feast on sap produced from grass stalks, enabling them to mature and sprout petals. These Pikmin are stronger and faster than the normal 'leafy' Pikmin

Described by one casual observer as simply "barking", Shigeru Miyamoto's latest *tour de force* is, indeed, a little on the esoteric side. Having crash-landed on a familiar yet decidedly alien world, the game's tiny hero is tasked with locating the 30 scattered pieces of his crippled ship before continuing on his journey. However, the diminutive astronaut isn't big enough to remove obstacles or carry the ship parts, and so has to rely on the assistance of Pikmin, bizarre bipedal vegetable characters only too happy to to do the spaceman's bidding.

Having located the first red Pikmin ship, a single Pikmin creature is ejected which rapidly grows to maturity. Once plucked from the ground, it can be used to cut down flowers and then carry the resultant 'puck' back to the Pikmin vessel-cum-dispenser. The puck is beamed on board, and two new Pikmin are produced which can then be used to cut more flowers to generate more Pikmin, and so on.

Once the two other craft have been located, your army of followers expands to include yellow and blue Pikmin. The yellow ones are able to throw bombs which are 'laid' by ghostly flying insectoids, while the blue are immune to the perils of water.

And so the astronaut's quest is split between the three Pikmin types, using yellows to destroy solid walls, blues to traverse ponds and reds as your workaday grunts. But Pikmin are even more adept than that; when put to task they're able to move boxes, extend branches, and – when employed *en masse* – dispatch the larger inhabitants of this curiously rustic landscape, the carcasses of which yield greater numbers of Pikmin.

Like *Populous* and its ilk, managing your massed Pikmin (you can have up to 100 in action at any one time) is where much of the empowered enjoyment lies. As **Steven Poole** puts it this issue, "God games create their own overarching pseudo-narrative entirely out of the gradual acquisition and proper dispensation of power." Indeed.

Having minions to do your bidding has its own potent appeal; but conversely, controlling so many of them at once can also prove to be a chore. When crossing a narrow walkway, or trying to move up a ramp, you'll often lose Pikmin over the edge, or get them stuck in nooks and crannies. Later on, flying creatures come to carry them away or blow them into the ground, whereupon you have to break off your mission in order to exhume the little fellows.

Pikmin is ostensibly a puzzle game, in that rebuilding your spaceship isn't just a case of locating sections and carrying them home. Often you'll need to destroy obstacles, construct bridges and defeat large creatures which have inadvertently swallowed the parts. Ultimately, successful retrieval of the hardware relies on the correct deployment of all three Pikmin species. In actuality, none of the puzzles are that tricky, and most of them can be overcome by, literally, throwing Pikmin at the problem. Success is predicated on the adage of safety – and strength – in numbers.

Graphically, *Pikmin* is quite splendid, with exquisitely textured and lit landscapes and

Pikmin is undoubtedly suffused with that old Miyamoto magic but, although addictive, it leaves one feeling oddly underwhelmed

Previously in E99









utterly realistic water. Even when you have 100 semi-intelligent Pikmin scurrying around, there's never a hint of slowdown or glitching. The only real downside is that the quest is short and, barring a few cast-iron enemies, surprisingly easy: a couple of evenings hard play should see it off, and while it's an enjoyable experience, replaying the same four areas doesn't hold enormous appeal.

Pikmin is undoubtedly suffused with that old Miyamoto magic but, although addictive, it leaves one feeling oddly underwhelmed. It's a beautiful and engrossing game, but has the feel of a technical demo writ large. The game is played out at the same languid pace, and lacks a sense of drama. Having said that, a larger, more varied *Pikmin 2* would certainly be most welcome.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten











The brief – and unusually poor – intro sequence, shows our spaceman hero colliding with an asteroid and plummeting planetwards. The ship is broken into 30 pieces which must be retrieved and beamed aboard









Camera obscura

Pikmin provides three levels of camera zoom (in normal and overhead views), and you can lock the camera to an over-the-shoulder viewpoint. But to pan around the scene, you need to then move the astronaut, which proves irksome. Arguably the option to have a freely rotating camera operated independently would have been preferable, given the complexity of the landscape and your often restricted view of the action.

Civilization III

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **Firaxis** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now**





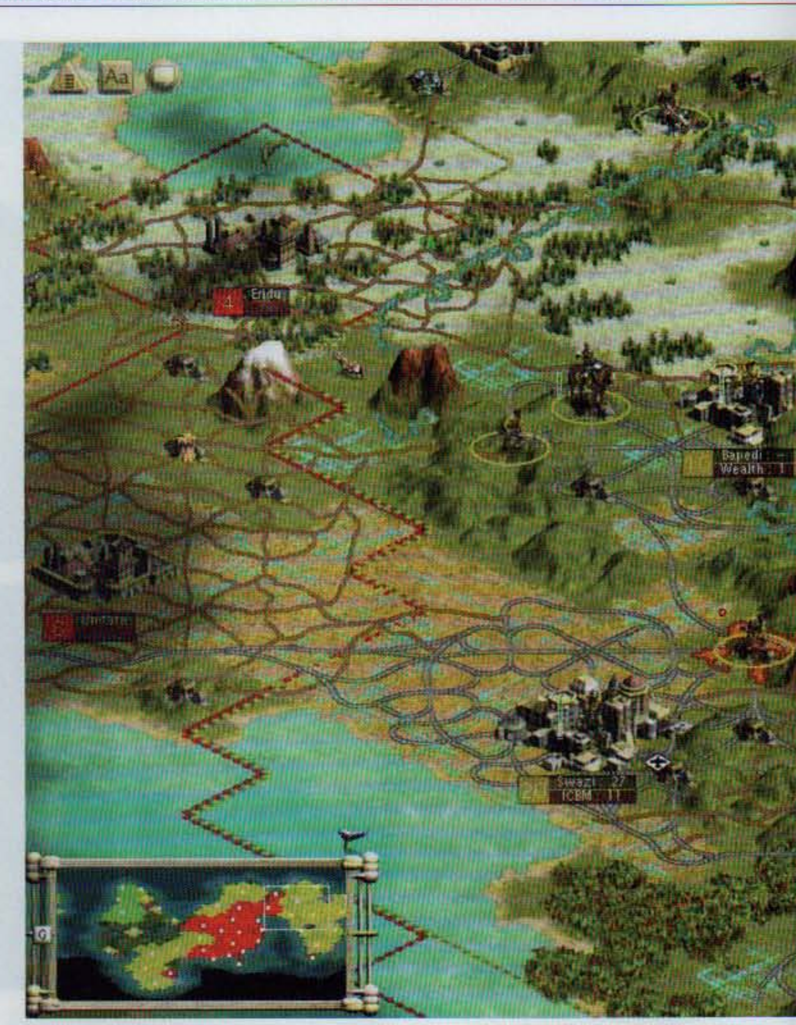


City placements are rarely simple. Few settlements are naturally equipped to serve as military outposts, industrial powerhouses, and cultural centres

Few titles bring along as much anticipatory baggage as *Civilization III*. Travelling light or inconspicuously with the name Sid Meier emblazoned on your passport is hard enough at the best of times but when the trip undertaken is a third visit to the Holy Land of turn-based strategy gaming then the air of anxiety and expectation is so potent it can agitate sniffer dogs and trigger airport metal detectors.

Thankfully it's high hopes rather than corrosive fears that have been realised in this eagerly-awaited addition to a ten-year-old dynasty. Revisions wrought with delicacy and dynamism leave no element untouched compounding existing complexity without ever compromising balance or bonhomie. The tensions between exploration, scientific endeavour, economic management, military conquest, and diplomacy were always engrossing but with the inclusion of a new cultural dimension in decision-making they assume levels of transcendent subtlety.

Cities now exude culture in the same way that they generate tax revenue, food stocks, and production shields. The factories and field systems of this output are urban improvements like temples, cathedrals, and coliseums along with the prestigious Wonders of the World such as the Sistine Chapel and the Globe Theatre. A cultural Constantinople on the border of a Philistine power may actually seduce arts-starved settlements into switching allegiance



Pollution is a constant headache during the industrial and modern eras. If left unchecked it can lead to global warming and consequent desertification

In a commercial climate where complexity is almost a dirty word *Civilization III* is a lesson in integrity and studied self-improvement

allowing, for the first time, those players of a more passive persuasion an alternative to the spear and the stealth bomber.

In practice, however peace-loving a potentate there will be times when turning the other cheek only achieves corresponding fractures. In these instances a rigorously rationalised combat system incorporating new civilisation-specific military specialists takes centre-stage. Although zones of control around units have sensibly been eliminated, combat stats simplified, and opportunity fire and automatic retreat enabled, it's the inclusion of bombardment and the overhaul of the mechanics of aerial warfare that represent the most significant battlefield breakthroughs.

Sharpened geography generation routines create more credible continents across which are scattered the new tradeable strategic and luxury resources. These lend added focus to territorial acquisition and inject interest into trade and international relations. Access to resources like oil and aluminium is now, along with scientific advance, a prerequisite for the construction of the majority of the 60+ unit types. By strengthening *Civilization III*'s historical logic and extending the interdependencies between existing elements Firaxis has thickened the soup without recourse to bland carbohydrates.

A present lack of multiplayer capability places an onerous responsibility on the shoulders of AI opponents. The burden is borne largely without complaint as leaders of up to eight different civs pursue their own thoroughly plausible strategic agendas according to personality traits or ethnic characteristics. Diplomatic interaction between sentient and silicon has its own entertaining yet impeccable rationality. Peace treaties, military alliances, trade embargoes, rights of passage, maps, scientific advances, cities… almost all possessions can be slid across the negotiating table. The suspicious, snide, or sycophantic banter that accompanies such political proceedings consummates the illusion.

Throughout the electronic arts cerebral charisma all too rarely shares a package with

Previously in E104





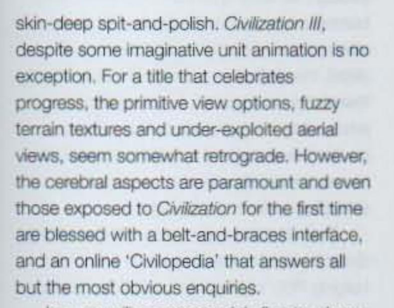








The threat of nuclear conflict hangs over the later phases of many games. Developing SDI provides limited protection from ICBMs



skin-deep spit-and-polish. *Civilization III*, despite some imaginative unit animation is no exception. For a title that celebrates progress, the primitive view options, fuzzy terrain textures and under-exploited aerial views, seem somewhat retrograde. However, the cerebral aspects are paramount and even those exposed to *Civilization* for the first time are blessed with a belt-and-braces interface, and an online 'Civilopedia' that answers all but the most obvious enquiries.

In a prevailing commercial climate where complexity is almost a dirty word *Civilization III* is a lesson in intellectual integrity and studied self-improvement.

Edge rating: Nine out of ten





Keeping abreast of intricate international relations is surprisingly easy. A foreign advisor helpfully reminds players if a petitioner has double-crossed them in the past



Outrageous fortune

Asynchronous technological progress means it's not uncommon to see swordsmen squaring up to machine-gun-toting paratroopers and tanks tangling with chariots on the *Civilization III* battlefield. Although mêlée mechanics naturally favour the smart bomb over the scimitar there is a sufficiently large slice of serendipity in the equation to produce the occasional feat of giant-killing. Trusting in superior weaponry especially in urban assaults is particularly imprudent. However primitive the defending garrison, a softening artillery or aerial bombardment is now a sensible prelude to a city attack.

Jak And Daxter

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEA** Developer: **Naughty Dog** Price: **£40** Release: **December 11**









The real focus of the game is the collection of power cells (top), which serve to activate devices and unlock further areas of the gameworld

Despite its less-than-stellar heritage, the despicable name and the suffocating hype, Naughty Dog has managed to deliver a quite stunning PS2 platform adventure. *Jak And Daxter* unashamedly pillages inspiration from the platforming canon, but does so with such *élan*, and wraps it all up with such visual splendour, you've no option but to forgive the developer's brazen intellectual thievery.

Jak and his sidekick partner Daxter embark on a quest that redefines the term 'sprawling'. With echoes of *Zelda 64*'s Hyrule field, the horizon contains clues as to your eventual destination, be it a distant, mist-cloaked island or the tip of an ancient undersea temple... Movement between areas isn't entirely seamless, granted, but at least disc access is kept to a minimum.

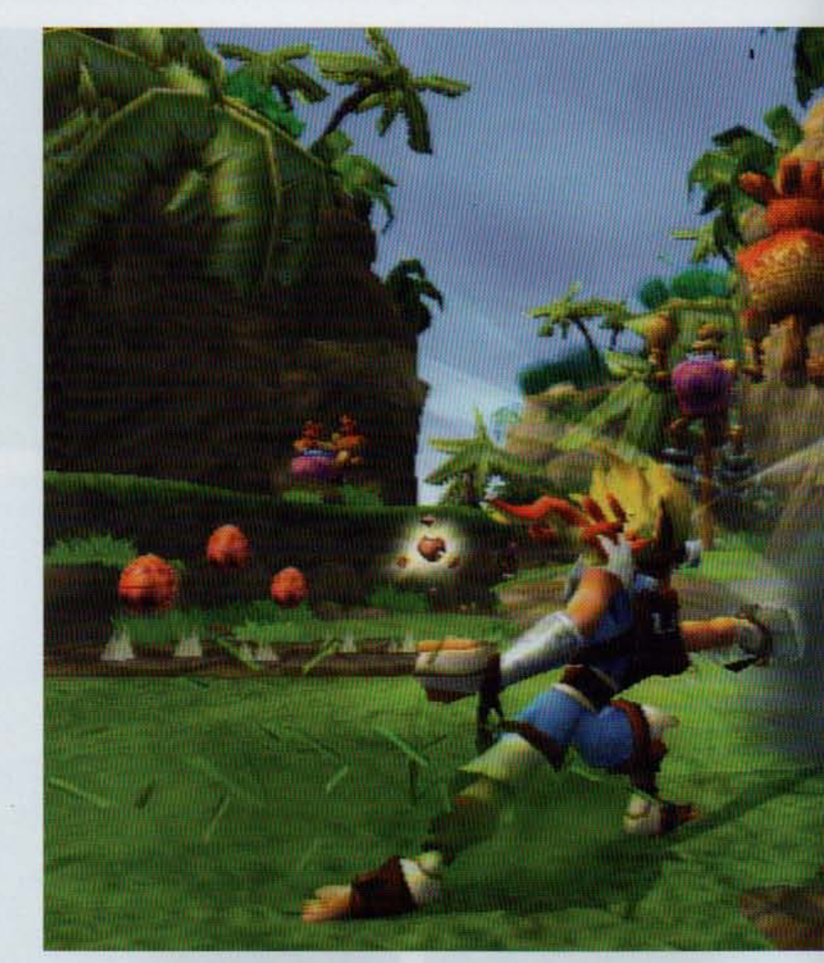
The game structure is now fairly *de rigueur* for platform adventures: a quaint coastal village acts as your base, and once distant areas have been unlocked, you can move freely to and fro using transporters. In each zone, the duo have to acquire power cells (the *Banjo-Kazooie* equivalent of Jiggys) to help solve puzzles, while bronze 'Precursor Orbs' (the *D-K 64* equivalent of bananas) can be collected and traded for various favours. Chests and cases reveal energy and other useful collectables, which are tallied, per area, on the inventory screen.

Shameless enthusiasm

Each new region is punctuated by a fresh set of tasks and mini-games, comprising reaction tests, *Zelda*-style mini-quests or the adroit use of Jak's hover-bike. Naturally, you're free to allocate your own time to the challenge in hand: should you tire of one area, simply backtrack to complete another task elsewhere.

It would be easy for a cynical discounting of *Jak And Daxter*, but as with the sour-faced adult in Disneyworld, who by the end of the day is singing along to 'It's A Small World' and wearing a daft Mickey Mouse hat, *Jak And Daxter* wins you over with its sheer enthusiasm and an expansive gameworld to explore. Yes, it's derivative, but it's also classically playable in much the same way as the various games it pays homage to.

Sony couldn't have wished for a better standard bearer, especially with the mass-market shopping spree looming large



Although Daxter takes full billing on the title screen, in play he's little more than a graphical novelty, with only Jak directly controllable. Perhaps there's an opportunity for independent play in *Jak And Daxter 2*?

However, a key element in the enjoyment of *Jak And Daxter* is its visual grandeur. The game is stunningly beautiful, evoking surprise and wonder at every turn, whether you're standing atop a towering brass powerstation or simply turning a corner, only to be suddenly faced with an unexpected sweeping vista. And while it's true that graphics do not a game make, here they play a vital role in generating a convincing, consistent environment, and as a constant drive to progress and see more of this lavish gameworld.

While there are some who would bemoan the abilities of PS2 in the face of hardware from Nintendo and Microsoft, Naughty Dog have managed to draw some amazing technical feats from Sony's silicon. Heat haze hovers above flaming torches; draw distance is vast; noon turns to midnight through the daily spectrum of colours; and, barring a few scenes where the 3D engine attempts to render an insane amount of detail, the games runs fluidly. On top of this there's the usual array of particle effects, smoke, fog, reflection mapping... Sony couldn't have wished for a better standard bearer, especially with the mass-market shopping spree looming large.

There is some regret that *Jak And Daxter* doesn't contain more innovation, but like a bulging Pick 'n' Mix bag, there's something here to please everyone. It may be the bastard child of *Mario*, *Zelda*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Crash Bandicoot*, but it's surely the most accomplished of mongrels.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Previously in E99









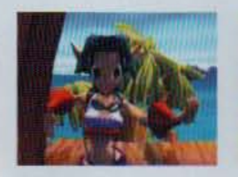




Think of an aspect of platform or adventure games, and there's a chance it'll crop up in *Jak And Daxter*. From *Donkey Kong*-style log-jumping to minecart rides to lava worlds, the full gamut of platforming clichés is in glorious abundance



Jak And Daxter is not short on variety. The game takes many twists and turns along the way, ushering in all manner of locations, mini-games, play styles and characters







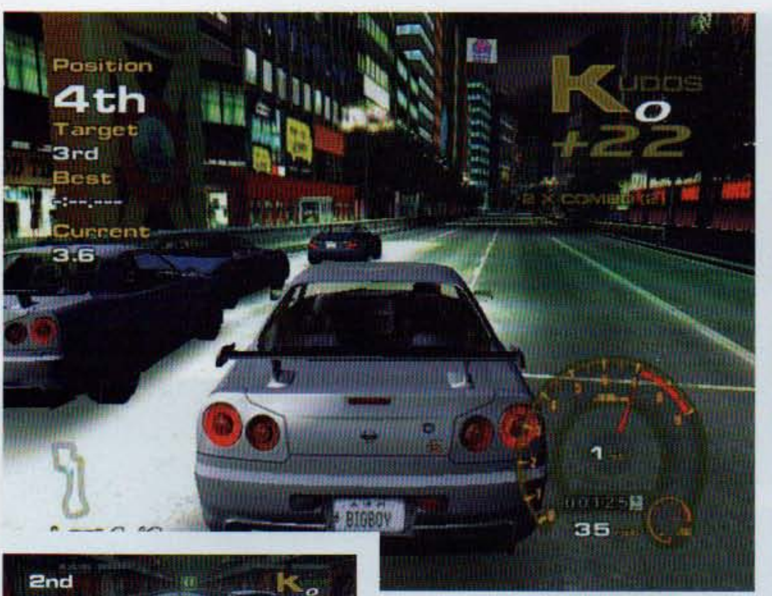
Amusement vision

The quality of *Jak And Daxter*'s intro sequence and cut-scenes is exceptional. The animation is full of attitude and personality, and the voice-overs perfectly complement the characters. Not only that, but the scenes are well-edited, informative, funny – and mercifully succinct.



Project Gotham Racing

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Bizarre Creations** Price: **$50 (£40)** Release: **Out now (US) March 14 (UK)** Previously in **E99**











All the usual splitscreen multiplayer modes are included (above). Expect night vision to be severely impaired if headlights pop-out (right)



Damage limitation

The prospect of damaging some of the most expensive cars in the world is a welcome addition to *Project Gotham Racing*. Headlights pop out, side panels dent and bumpers crumple. But apart from the occasional loss of headlight beams in night races, damage has little impact on the game experience other than replacing a polished exterior with a mangled texture.



The visuals are stunning for a first generation racing game on a new console. Reflections play convincingly across windscreens and the replay mode captures every dramatic moment from street race encounters

In the world of politics the term focus group has become a dirty word, but the many criticisms of *Metropolis Street Racer* – gathered by Microsoft and Bizarre Creations from consumers – have done *Project Gotham Racing* a great deal of good. Gone is the stultifying structure and copious menus, replaced now by a healthy emphasis on immediate and rewarding progression.

Early races acclimatise drivers to the handling and vigorous handbraking manoeuvres with aplomb, while later challenges draw on every ounce of knowledge to complete the very demanding circuits. Riding the learning curve is as satisfying as the pleasure derived from unlocking vehicles as delicious as the Corvette RT-10 and the Ferrari F50.

The kudos system also returns but has now been overhauled to provide instant feedback to the player. Thrill as your vehicle takes to the air, moves onto two wheels or powerslides around one of the more violent corners of Shimbua or Pacific Heights. Kudos racks up on screen as these manoeuvres are performed (and are as quickly snatched away if contact with scenery is made) adding to the tension and providing vital information on the best techniques to employ for the given course. Enter the main Kudos Challenge mode, and individual races must be won by collecting enough points to win a bronze, silver or gold medal. A collection of bronze medals are required to move on to the next stage. This eliminates the frustration experienced in *MSR* of constantly re-racing sections to build up total Chapter kudos.

The most exquisite aspect of *Project Gotham Racing*, though, is the feel and feedback given from the different road surfaces. Bumps and undulations affect handling in the subtlest of ways, suspension rocks, tyres leave the road and momentary periods on two wheels cause the steering to twitch. It's a refined arcade sensation which never veers into cold and over-technical driving. The AI, too, is excellent with rival racers making unforced errors and aggressively beating you into corners should you choose the wrong breaking point.

It may not have the depth and customisation of *Gran Turismo 3*, but Bizarre Creations have delivered a more immediate and thrilling driving experience for those who prefer the sound of screeching tyres over purring engines.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Fuzion Frenzy

Format: **Xbox** Publisher: **Microsoft** Developer: **Blitz** Price: **$50 (£40)** Release: **Out now (US) March 14 (UK)** Previously in E99

Billed as a collection of 45 mini-games, in the same vein as *Mario Party* or *Sonic Shuffle*, *Fuzion Frenzy* should be packed with excitement, competitiveness, and brief peaks of smug self-exaltation. So why is it that the only thing you remember after playing it is what it doesn't have?

No imagination: There's a vibrancy traditional to the genre, and, for a game developed with over-the-top intentions in mind, *Fuzion Frenzy* draws from a curiously subdued palette. It's exuberance on Mogadon, painted with dark primary colours and tongue-in-cheek realism; tone and shadow carbon-cloned from a generic first-person shooter. It's an English devco ripping off a Japanese concept and painting it with imitation Americana. It feels strained.

No innovation: However they're dressed up, the majority of the games fit into several oft-visited categories. Four near-identical primitive rhythm action romps, multiple variations of *Snake*, a couple of barely playable racing games and a dozen appalling dash-and-collect rounds all make an appearance. There are more, but there is *nothing* to surprise here, and there isn't a single game that couldn't have been done just as effectively with sprite-based graphics on a system two generations older.

No impact: The graphical thrills may add nothing to the game, but the slowdown imposed by them certainly detracts. More than that, the interaction between the player characters, particularly on levels that see the wiry figures scuttling around without vehicles, is ineffectively executed and mostly redundant. Much of the time it feels like you're running around doing your own thing, and that's usually the best strategy. And, at the end of each round, when the winner's proudly announced, the result feels random. It's hardly cause for celebration.

So: no imagination, no innovation, no impact, no fun. Of the 45 games on offer, perhaps three of them provide the sort of rudimentary thrill *Bishi Bashi Special* provided. None of them come close to matching *Monkey Ball*'s delicious minigames – bite-sized slices of gaming which show that next generation power can blend effectively with multiplayer simplicity. That's the thing, you see: the success of the genre on other formats shows there's clearly a market for a good party game on the XBox. But *Fuzion Frenzy* isn't it.

Edge rating: Three out of ten









The propeller-based game above, where you must collect tokens while jumping and ducking the blades, is flawed. The best strategy is just to run with the direction of the blades



Battling bots

Fuzion Frenzy requires four players for every game, so empty spaces must be filled with bots. AI can be set on three different levels, though playing with even just one of them lessens the game's meagre charms significantly. Perhaps it's important to state that, while the game is almost pointless when computer opponents are involved, there's some fun to be had here if you're playing with three other players. But that's true of most things, and it's difficult to believe that, given the choice between a 30-round *Snake* challenge or a quick five-minute splitscreen deathmatch on *Halo*, anyone would take *Fuzion Frenzy*'s reductive path.





This game sees the players throwing fused sticks of dynamite at each other, as their platforms scream down a vertical shaft. The dramatics add nothing to the game, even failing to distract from the tedium

Shenmue II

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sega-AM2** Price: **£30** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E**102





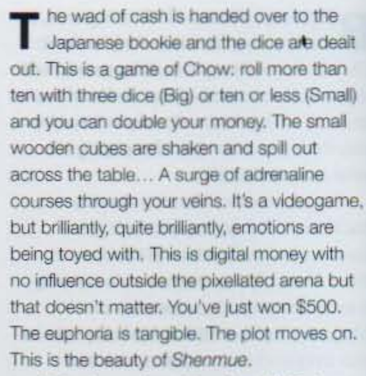
The streets of Hong Kong are impressive, with a large community of people and shops. Maps help exploration but come at a cost of $5 each







Visiting temples and discussing the finer points of martial arts provides just one of the plot's threads in *Shenmue II*. As in the first game, new manoeuvres can be mastered to help Ryo defeat unpleasant thugs



Playing hooky

The number of mini-games in *Shenmue II* has been vastly expanded upon from the first title. Arm-wrestling, leaf-catching, soot-cleaning, book-carrying, darts – even a passable version of *OutRun* – seriously threaten to sidetrack Ryo from his mission. Sega estimates that the sequel should take 20 hours to complete. **Edge** spent rather longer. The opportunity to operate a pachinko stall proved just too alluring…

The wad of cash is handed over to the Japanese bookie and the dice are dealt out. This is a game of Chow: roll more than ten with three dice (Big) or ten or less (Small) and you can double your money. The small wooden cubes are shaken and spill out across the table… A surge of adrenaline courses through your veins. It's a videogame, but brilliantly, quite brilliantly, emotions are being toyed with. This is digital money with no influence outside the pixellated arena but that doesn't matter. You've just won $500. The euphoria is tangible. The plot moves on. This is the beauty of *Shenmue*.

Following on from Ryo Hazuki's first adventure, which saw his father murdered at the hands of Lan Di, *Shenmue II* places you on the wharf in Hong Kong ready to tackle chapters 2-5 of this epic tale. Ryo has little to help him on his quest: a notebook, the mysterious Phoenix Mirror, a few plastic toys (you can transfer those collected in the first adventure over to the second) and a penchant for asking questions of every passer-by. Although early exploration of the area around the docks (now quite a regular hang-out for the teenager) is a little stilted, the game soon opens up to provide a vast and rewarding experience.

Déjà vu

There are no major changes to the formula which underpinned the excellent first game. Ryo must still find his way through the adventure by collecting guidance from the local community, with the odd Quick Time Action event, fighting sequence or mini-game breaking up the intrigue of day-to-day investigations. The game isn't without its flaws, though. The control mechanism is just as unwieldy as before, and the supporting cast of hundreds, coupled with the enormity of the locations, is capable of generating slowdown and pop-up.

However, the sheer scope and beauty of Yu Suzuki's sequel is at times breathtaking. While the cut-scenes in *Shenmue II* are as elegant as those of its predecessor, the narrative is more enthralling and surprising. Friendships are won and enemies defeated in a story which takes in the sights and sounds of Hong Kong, Kowloon and Guilin. *Shenmue II* demands a huge investment of time and patience, but those willing to make the effort will be rewarded with a scintillating experience.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

Virtua Tennis 2

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega/BigBen** Developer: **Hitmaker** Price: **£30** Release: **November 23** Previously in **E**103

Virtua Tennis was undeniably a sports benchmark, delivering great animation, beautiful controls and a fine fourplayer mode. If only Sega had released the Dreamcast version *before* – rather than a month after – Wimbledon, the machine might've lasted a little longer. But then that's Sega all over.

Too late now to do any more than soothe Dreamcast's looming demise, *Virtua Tennis 2* doesn't mess too much with the basic setup. Player animation has been enhanced, and the modified two-button control system (A and B add top or back spin; pressing both together lobs) provides even greater control over the ball. Now no other tennis sim gets closer to replicating the intricacies of the sport, the myriad of options behind every lob and finely-tuned volley, than *Virtua Tennis 2*.

While the World Circuit mode retains its globe theme, the game mechanics have also been redesigned. The object now is to build a player from scratch before launching into the various tournaments and skill tests. To add some realism, the competitive matches are placed on a calendar, and players must build their skills and wait for the right competitions to come along before signing up. This shift brings vital structure to a once random experience and provides solo players with a much clearer challenge. The game's undergone a lush visual overhaul, too – the sports TV presentation is spot-on and the courts look magnificent.

Not so revolutionary...

Owners of the original release who bought *VT* simply for casual multiplayer action, however, will find little to justify forking out for the sequel. The gameplay tweaks are just that – innovative tweaks which enhance rather than revolutionise. Even the addition of pro-level female players is more an aesthetic flourish: the male game has been slowed down so much from its aggressive reality, the two sexes pretty much meet in the middle.

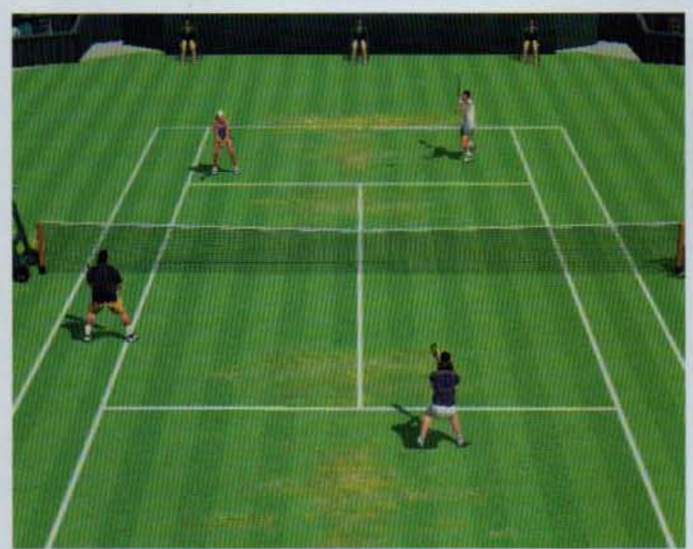
For newcomers, though, *Virtua Tennis 2* is an essential Dreamcast purchase. If the machine is to die, at least it's going with some dignity. *Shenmue 2*, *Rez* and *Virtua Tennis 2* are far above the usual dross evacuated onto the shelves when a machine goes down. And until Hitmaker's series migrate to other platforms, the DC remains the top choice for the ultimate tennis sim. If only it'd been football or F1, the DC's fate might've been so very different...

Edge rating: Eight out of ten









The enhanced two-button control system, which enables you to add top or backspin, or lob the ball, is just one technical tweak which ensures *Virtua Tennis* will live on for some time



Although more an aesthetic consideration than a noble concession to sexual equality, the addition of professional female players is a step forward for Sega's classic tennis sim





Alternative tennis...

Veterans of *Virtua Tennis* will be pleased to note that the new skill tests in *Virtua Tennis 2* are as challenging and addictive as ever. Alien Force is *Space Invaders*, but with serve machines replacing the twitchy aliens, while Tank Attack has the player contending with two – yes, *two* – tanks with baseline strokes. Most amusing of all is Prize Sniper, which works like the conveyor belt bit at the end of 'The Generation Game', except you knock the prizes off rather than trying to remember them. The range of tests is wider this time, too, with a couple aimed just at your running and court coverage skills. A good idea.

World Rally Championship

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: SCEE Developer: Evolution Studios Price: £40 Release: Out now

Previously in E91

Sony's latest PS2 road racer begs comparison with Codemasters' award-winning *Colin McRae Rally 2.0*, released over a year ago. Turns out there's little to separate the two... While *World Rally Championship* is visually superior in all departments and offers wonderful views – complete with vertiginous drops from steep mountain climbs – the nuance of handling and implementation of damage haven't been effected quite so well.

Indeed, initial races through the early rallies, including the cliffs of Monaco and Sweden's icy roads, provide diverting if slightly bland entertainment. Events never really become tense enough to either set the pulse racing or strain the sinews. The Dual Shock rumble facility isn't exploited nearly as effectively as in *Gran Turismo 3*'s rally sections, either, and the general feel and feedback is inferior to Polyphony's masterpiece. On the default setting, the game is also far too easy; most driving game enthusiasts will win the World Championship Rally on their first attempt.

A wheel transformation

But the game transforms once you select the Professional mode and hook up the Official Logitec GT Force Steering Wheel. Opt for the cockpit view and the experience occasionally borders on the sublime. With the tremendous feedback delivered through the device and the level of competition increased, every corner becomes a real challenge. Clinging to the undulating roads of Finland or steering close to the cliff edges in Argentina delivers outstanding thrills, while negotiating the 14 rallies which make up the championship season becomes a tense battle to shave seconds off times at every stage.

To complement the full Championship mode, Time Trial, Single Rally, WRC Challenge and a two-player option are also provided. While Time Trial and Single Rally are self-explanatory, the WRC mode offers early adopters of the game the chance to enter their section times into a special Sony organised competition. Unfortunately, the two-player mode is abysmal, with frames rates dropping to laughable levels.

WRC is a great first attempt to bring the official rally experience to the PS2. But glitches – painfully long loading times and a dismal two-player mode – prevent a distinguished game from being elevated to an exceptional one.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten





Sunlight glinting over the horizon and threatening to seriously impair your view of the road ahead is just one of the graphical flourishes which make *WRC* a joy to play. The handling is a touch 'loose', however



Name that tune

Although there are options for tweaking vehicle set-ups, they aren't particularly comprehensive. You can adjust the tyre type, steering sensitivity, suspension and gear ratios to a minimal degree, but usually the default settings aren't worth changing. While the emphasis is on accessibility, the lack of options compared to *Colin McRae Rally 2.0* or *Gran Turismo 3* are telling.









All the WRC manufacturers are included, adding to the general feeling of authenticity. Dials and handling characteristics change accordingly, although you won't necessarily notice GT3-quality nuances

Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance

World Rally Champi

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Interplay** Developer: **Black Isle Studios** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**96/**E**104











Creature discomforts

Quite apart from constituting some of the game's more memorable set pieces, *Dark Alliance*'s bosses and mini-bosses provide an injection of arcade pacing. In particular the early appearance of a many-tentacled behemoth behaves in a manner more akin to a 2D shoot 'em up boss, spewing forth a barrage of projectiles, but later appearances of creatures ranging from dragons to an especially hard Lizardman also conform to the rule. The only drawback is that some bosses really do require too much old-school repeated exploitation of a single weakness. Which is in fact one of the game's few drawbacks.



During certain moments, *Dark Alliance* may seem to bear an uncanny similarity to the mouse-click combat dynamic of *Diablo*, or the ravenous hordes of *Gauntlet*. Any such comparison proves slightly inadequate though, in the light of the highly accessible yet gratifyingly sophisticated level of depth the game achieves

Anybody expecting the sort of expansive experience that has characterised the *Baldur's Gate* series so far might be surprised by the first PlayStation2 outing for the franchise. From start to finish players are funnelled through a series of dungeons, populated with a varied bestiary, and punctuated by safe areas, in a manner that contrasts with the freeform navigation of the PC titles. But while the simplicity of *Dark Alliance* may prompt comparisons with titles such as *Diablo*, Black Isle Studios has maintained intact the features that really characterise the first two chapters of *Baldur's Gate* – namely epiphany-inducing wanderings and engrossing combat.

In streamlining the environments, to a sequence of sprawling, multi-layered dungeons, linking passages, and safe areas, the developer has distilled the essence of its PC precursors while increasing the pace. Thanks to handy recall potions that return characters to the nearest safe area there is little fruitless wandering, and given the inclusion of a broad geographical sweep of the now familiar Sword Coast, there's incentive to progress despite the essential linearity. The unfolding of new environments, and the consequent exposure of new adversaries and puzzles, prove essential in preserving the compulsive exploration of previous chapters.

Exploration isn't the only facet that has been streamlined to appeal to console gamers; combat is equally hypnotic. Though not as intricate as the party-based realtime strategy with which *Baldur's Gate* devotees are familiar, tactics are still varied, owing largely to the continued character customisation over the course of the game. By acquiring magic items, increasing in level, and tailoring attributes, feats and spells, it's possible to further refine the distinct strengths of one of three characters. And with each enemy possessing unique weaknesses, it's also necessary to vary your approach.

Throw in some scintillating water and heat haze effects, the canny positioning of lectern-like save points, and a twoplayer cooperative mode, and it's clear that a painstaking amount of attention has been paid to transforming a resolutely intricate PC title into a highly polished console experience. It's this approach that has produced such an enjoyable game, making comparisons to the likes of *Diablo* redundant.

Edge rating: **Eight out of ten**

Bravo Music

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: SCEI Developer: In-house Price: ¥4,800 (£27) Release: Out now (Japan) TBA (UK) Previously in E102

True story. Guy walks into a shop in Japan, finds the shelf with *GT3* and *Everybody's Golf*. He traces his hand across them, looking for something. He can't find it. Confused, he wanders over to the counter, and asks where the Sony in-house games are. The shopkeeper shakes his head and directs him back to the shelf. He points at *Ka*. He points at *Ape Escape 2001*. He points at *Bravo Music*. "Kutaragi... he's gone crazy..." The shopkeeper walks back to the counter. The guy shrugs and walks out.

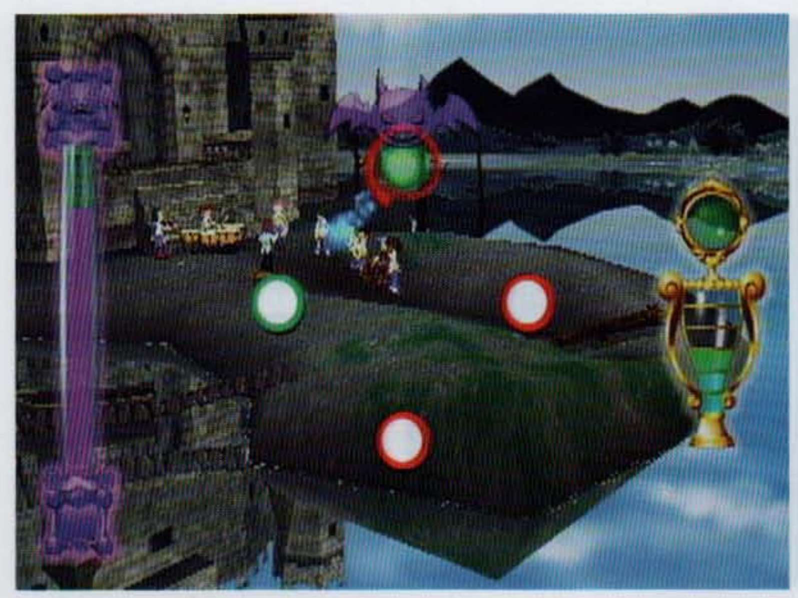
Watch Sony throw its in-house weight behind rhythm action at a stage when the genre's popularity appears to be waning and you'd be forgiven for agreeing. This is the first *Bravo Music* game, and the second, a Christmas-themed edition, ought to have hit Akihabara by the time you read this. More are planned, and the game's simplicity might not mean a large financial investment, but it does show a remarkable faith in the concept: a classical music conducting game.

Taking the pressure

An evenly spaced group of circles – three, four or five, depending on the time signature of the piece being played – sit in the centre of the screen, and a dot shifts between them. When the dot's inside the circle, the player must press a button. The colour of the circle indicates at which of three volumes the music must be played, and, correspondingly, how hard you must press the button. Since the player is marking the rhythm of the music, rather than playing the staccato sounds of specific instruments, the beat is unforgivingly constant; it's the amount of pressure that varies. And sometimes that can be painful, because the pieces are two or three times as long as what *Bemani* fans will be used to, and RSI seems a movement away.

But the results are glorious and well worth fighting thumb fatigue for, the orchestra swelling and dying away with each delicately weighted stroke of the baton. The interaction the player has with the music always feels absolute, and that's what makes the game. It's a clever use of the under-exploited pressure sensitivity of the DualShock 2, and another advance within the confines of the genre. And, at this stage, it doesn't really matter if the story's true, or if Kutaragi-san's crazy or not. Faith in diversity is a noble ideal, and *Bravo Music* deserves to see that faith repaid.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten







Getting 'Cool' means the bar will only increase a small amount. The real key to success is hitting all four beats spot on, with exactly the right amount of pressure, and managing a 'Bravo'







This level sees one of your band trying to woo a cellist. Conduct particularly badly, as shown in the shot above, and she'll get angry. Her mood isn't helped by the appearance of an irate love-struck schoolgirl



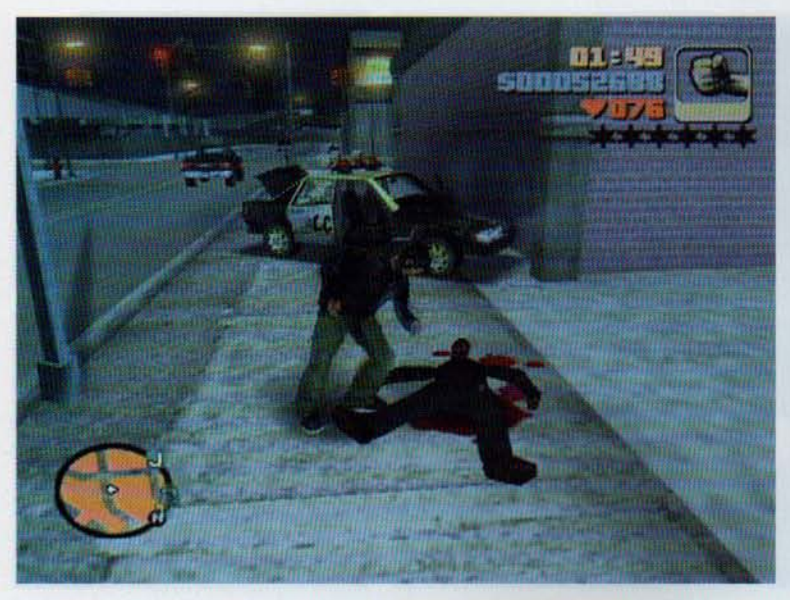
Top performance

Success in *Bravo Music* is gauged by the meter on the left of the screen. Get every beat in a bar spot-on and you're awarded with a 'Bravo', which boosts the success meter. When the success meter is full, it requires three failures in a row for it to start to drop, but when it starts falling it won't stop until you've conducted a bar of music perfectly. If the bar is full at a certain point in each piece, you get the chance to make the music segue into a different piece entirely. Complete that and bonus games are unlocked.

GTA 3

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Take 2** Developer: **Rockstar/DMA** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**102









Fans of the original who can't get used to *GTA*'s new 3D stylings will be pleased to note that a top-down perspective is available. Driving's much easier in the behind-wheel view, though

A zoom with a view

Although an obligatory feature of any first/third person arsenal, the sniper rifle initially seems at odds with the textbook *mêlée* weaponry available in *GTA3*. Surprisingly, it soon becomes one of the most gleefully mischievous offensives available (even more so than the riotous cars-for-kindling flamethrower), enabling a neat and remote approach to certain tasks. One memorable mission involves providing cover fire from the distance of a nearby rooftop, as a Mafioso explosions expert skulks his way across the deck of a well-patrolled rival ship.





The car damage is visually satisfying, although all it does is slow your car down. Smoke indicates the level of destruction, but it's best to bail before it gets too thick. Thankfully, replacements are easily available

Nothing burns as pleasingly as the *hoi polloi* of a city and so, with no review code forthcoming, it's with both regret and anticipation that **Edge** is forced to purloin a copy of *GTA3* from the shelves of its local gaming emporium. The air of studied gangster cool that surrounds Take 2's latest – caricatures more than characters; theatrics more than cinematics – is almost as clichéd as the flea-bitten leather jacket sported by the game's moody, taciturn lead. However, early play quickly dispels such concerns – the shift to 3D is a shrewd and rewarding step for the *GTA* universe.

For those unaware of *GTA*'s criminal record, both previous titles saw the player take the role of a wannabe crook, rapidly rising in villainous stature by completing short 'get A, destroy B, kill C' missions for cartoon bosses. *GTA 3* is equally amoral, and essentially a 3D facsimile, although the extra dimension creates more than a corresponding increase in flair, scale and aesthetic. Most heists rely on the holy trinity of planning, execution and a little bit of luck, but executing a tricky gangland hit through an adroit scheme of your own provides its own definitively visceral satisfaction.

The considered and burgeoning topography of Liberty City feels both intricate and robust. It's a place that sprawls but doesn't bustle, and the sparse ambient effects which accompany your on-foot travails are testament to this. In-vehicle, however, it's a different story. In true *GTA* fashion, there's an entire spectrum of radio stations to flick through, veering from the sardonic to the satirical.

The one jarring flaw is the spurious nature of up-close combat – it's an awkward system that stymies play during hectic hails of gangland warfare, and is doubly infuriating at the end of a protracted campaign. It feels even more unfair when juxtaposed with the wonderfully *laissez-faire* attitude of the cruising patrol cars. There's a lamentable lack of freedom for your own criminal genius, too. You're still boxed in by the whims of your current overlords – any schemes of your own ruthless devising are restricted to trivial pursuits for petty cash.

While the coherent and emergent behaviour of the city is limited to a local scale, *GTA3* definitely gets one crucial thing right: it's all about owning the streets, strutting your territory and walking tall.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Minna De Puyo Puyo

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sonic Team/Caret House** Price: **¥4,800 (£27)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)**

Accessibility alone determines whether a puzzle game lives or dies... *Tetris*, for example, hits the spot by throwing in a mere handful of elements (six types of falling block, an objective which amounts to simply filling in the gaps), while the more recent *Hot Potato* stumbles because it muddles the puzzle ethic by presenting six individual components for simultaneous juggling.

The *Puyo Puyo* series has always delicately – and successfully – walked the fine line between complexity and manageability: using groups of two, you seek to match four like-coloured blobs in order to remove them, thereby sending rogue blobs over to your opponent's play area. Ostensibly, that's it. But dig a little deeper and soon you'll be mastering the chain-reaction manoeuvres which lead to advanced Zen-like play.

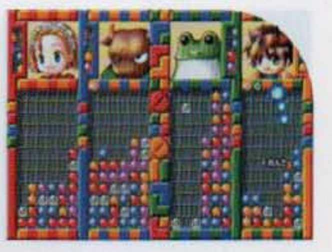
This magnificent GBA interpretation features clean presentation, a deliciously quirky (albeit superfluous) storyline and various types of blobs unseen in the original game. An absorbing Challenge mode and fourplayer support with one cart are also available.

No, it's not *Tetris* – what is? – but it's quite possibly the next best thing.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten



Line 'em up and watch them pop over to your opponent's field of play. For the GBA version, the developers have cunningly introduced a little more complexity to the colour-stacking dynamic





The ability to enjoy a fourplayer mode (top) via the single cart will impress the financially disadvantaged, while a Challenge mode and spurious (yet entertaining) storyline adds a certain *frisson* to the puzzling action

Doom

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Activision** Developer: **id Software/David A. Palmer Productions** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**102



Imps and Cacodemons, shotguns and BFGs – this is the *Doom* we know and love. It's tried-and-tested gameplay but without a few extra levels, weapons or new secrets there is little to get too excited about





Both a gamma setting and the option to turn the dynamic lighting off allow users to set their own brightness level. But some areas can still appear gloomy

Novelty items are usually found in Lucky Bags: glass poodles, spider-rings, cigarettes made out candy. Not really very lucky when you come to think of it. But if you plucked this excellent version of *Doom* from a bag full of other Game Boy Advance titles you wouldn't feel too hard done by. All 24 levels of the original game are here, complete with a multiplayer deathmatch mode (for those wealthy enough to have a cartridge each). Frame rates are smooth, lighting is well engineered and the action is just as immediate as the 1993 original.

But there the praise must stop because for all *Doom*'s cute portability and nostalgia-inducing sighs it is nothing more than a mere novelty. Once a few of the oh-so-familiar levels have been plumbed for their secrets and items, the familiarity soon begins to breed contempt. Sure, there may be a few gamers who missed out on the original – and *Doom* delivers many hours of time-killing moments perfect for bus rides and waiting rooms – but for most of us, this is simply tired gaming from another era. The multiplayer aspects add to a tight and fun package but at £35 it is still a very expensive trinket.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

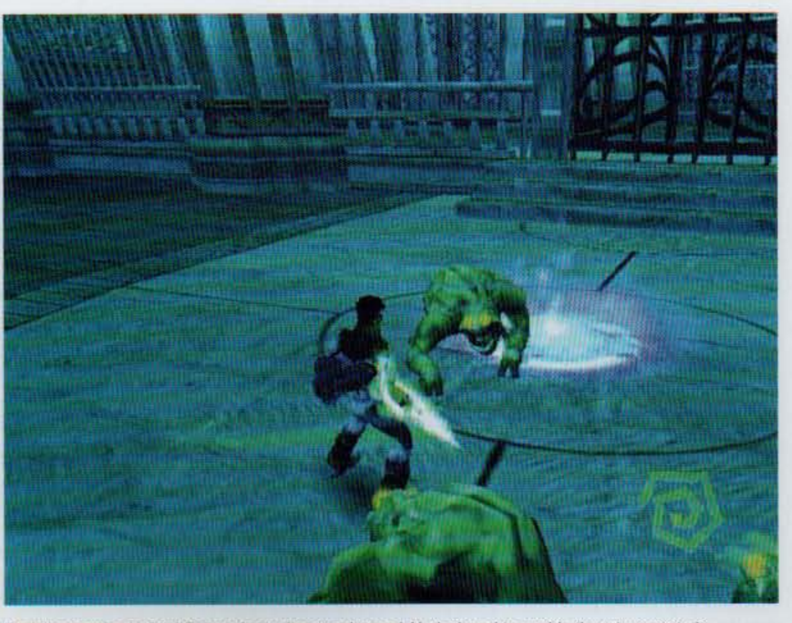
Soul Reaver 2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Crystal Dynamics** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E93**





Whether swimming underwater or tackling a cadre of wraith-like adversaries, Raziel must keep a watchful eye on his health coil. It has to be full for him to transform between his material and spectral states



Raziel's enemies in *Soul Reaver 2* now boast enhanced AI, designed to enable them to operate in groups and, occasionally, pursue your vamp beyond their immediate patrol areas.

Soul Reaver 2's story begins just where its PSone predecessor abruptly concluded, with hero Raziel pursuing nemesis Kain across time. But once you exit the portal, endure an inexcusably verbose cut-scene and pick up the controller – it sadly appears that, despite a platform leap, the gameplay remains pretty much the same. Your exploration of host world Nosgoth is as lonely as ever, with only underanimated foes keeping you company for much of the journey.

Regardless of tweaks to the system and a bloody *Mortal Kombat* makeover for Raziel's move list, no number of options for modifying the titular sword can disguise the fact that, fundamentally, *Soul Reaver 2* combat is dull. Run from the fights and hit the road, though, and the terrain soon evolves from *Soul Reaver*'s overused gloomy interiors. The puzzles, too, are more varied – and elegantly executed.

It's only because spookbusting has become such a crowded genre of late that the game's achievements are superseded by its last-gen limitations. *Luigi's Mansion* and *Devil May Cry* have raised the bar for stylish supernatural adventuring and *Soul Reaver 2* falls short of their slick, hyperactive standards.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Half-Life

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Vivendi Universal** Developer: **Gearbox** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now** Previously in **E66/E86**

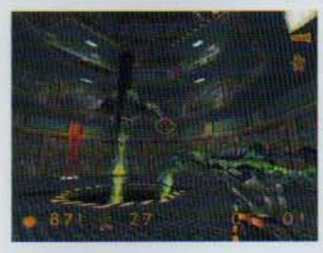
The good news is that the first console version of *Half-Life* to emerge from development hell isn't the grotesque hybrid many expected. It's more a genetic clone of the 1998 PC version. A few extra polygons have been sprinkled around and the textures are a little more detailed, but otherwise it's business as usual down at the Black Mesa Research Facility.

All the elements which made *Half-Life* so well regarded among the PC fraternity are included. There's the long-winded introduction of Gordon Freemen and his place in the Black Mesa pecking order, a stubborn insistence on quick saves (bringing with them the occasional instant death situation) and aliens straight out of cheap '50s monster flicks.

But it was always the plot which captivated audiences, and here – when compared to other PS2 FPS titles – *Half-Life* still delivers. Good level design and recognisably different environments, punctuated by moments of frenzied action, ensure your interest throughout; the moments involving attacks from military troops are particularly tense. Sure, it feels slightly dated, but *Half-Life* still provides an excellent action adventure for PS2 owners.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten





The creature in the Blast Pit provides one of the most memorable moments in *Half-Life*. Some investigation will eventually uncover the means to destroy it...



The damage animations and weapon recoil effects make the combat suitably 'meaty'. Although it's not as easy to play without a keyboard and mouse, the implementation of the dual analogue controls, enhanced by a handy lock-on function, ensures that console gamers will quickly come to terms with the controls

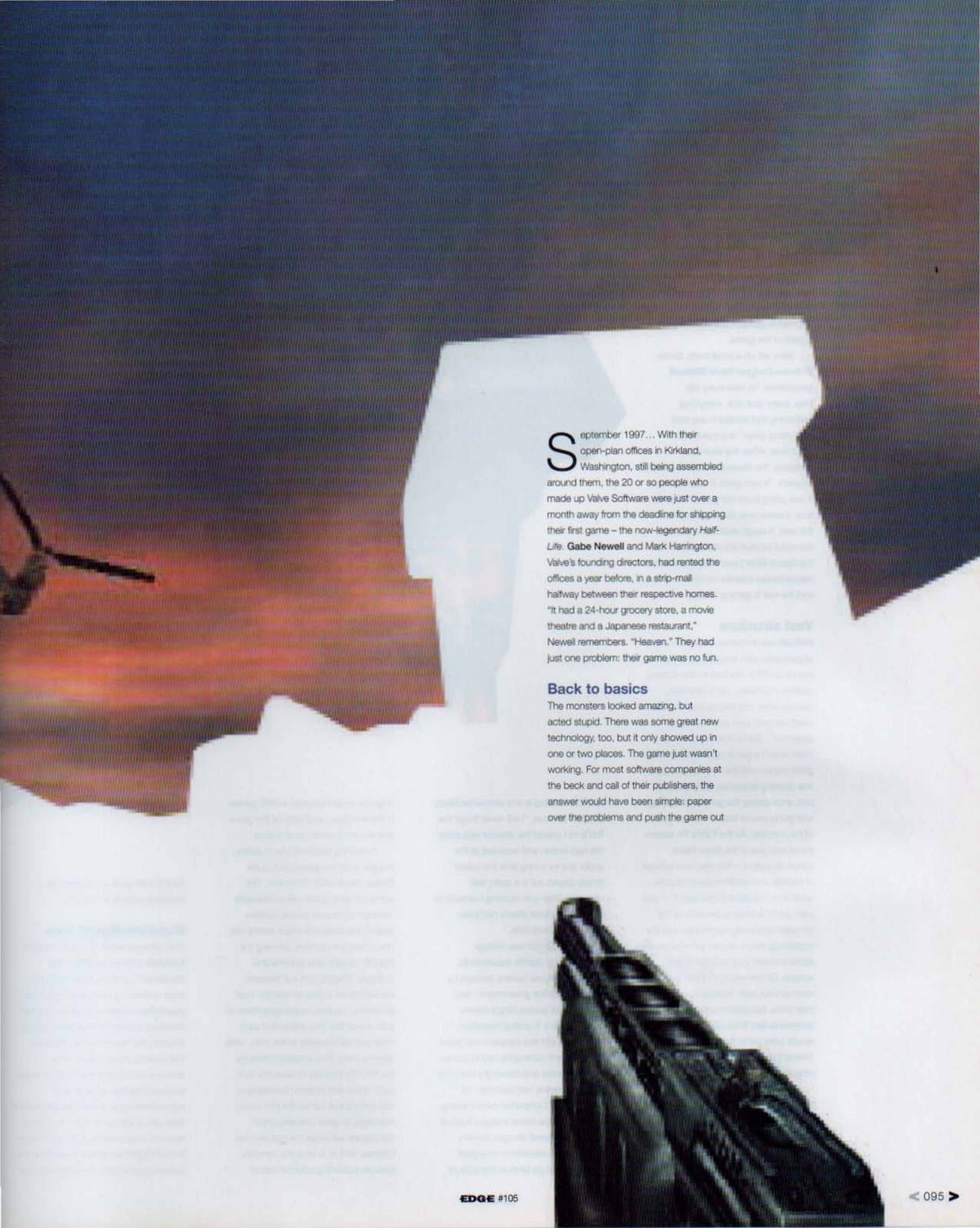


The making of…

Half-Life

How did a technically flaccid first-person shoot 'em up, peopled by dumb monsters and not much else, evolve into an industry-shattering FPS adventure that continues to garner top awards across the globe? **Edge** relives the genesis of Valve Software's epoch-making adventure to find out...

Format: **PC, PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Sierra**
Developer: **Valve Software**
Origin: **US**
Original release date: **November 1998**



September 1997... With their open-plan offices in Kirkland, Washington, still being assembled around them, the 20 or so people who made up Valve Software were just over a month away from the deadline for shipping their first game – the now-legendary *Half-Life*. **Gabe Newell** and Mark Harrington, Valve's founding directors, had rented the offices a year before, in a strip-mall halfway between their respective homes. "It had a 24-hour grocery store, a movie theatre and a Japanese restaurant," Newell remembers. "Heaven." They had just one problem: their game was no fun.

Back to basics

The monsters looked amazing, but acted stupid. There was some great new technology, too, but it only showed up in one or two places. The game just wasn't working. For most software companies at the beck and call of their publishers, the answer would have been simple: paper over the problems and push the game out

A combination of factors helped propel *Half-Life* into videogame history: a tightly integrated King-esque narrative, penned by Marc Laidlaw; breathtaking aesthetics, realised via a refined *Quake*-source 3D engine and Valve's proprietary animation techniques; plus adept use of atmospheric sonic and musical effects. The result? A videogame which set a new precedent for the immersive FPS experience

anyway. But for Harrington and Newell, who had cashed out of Microsoft after a total of 21 years between them, surrender was not an option. They decided to go back and rework every aspect of the game.

Valve set up a small team, Senior Software Designer **Kevin Birdwell** remembers, "to take every silly idea, every cool trick, everything interesting that existed in any kind of working state," and make one great level. When the level was complete, the whole development team played it. "It was great. It was the vision. It was going to be our game." The rest took another year, but it was worth the wait. A rough sketch of a bearded astronaut (known affectionately as 'Ivan the Space-Biker') eventually became the bespectacled scientist Gordon Freeman, and the rest is gaming history.

Vast structure

Half-Life was immense: over 30 hours of gameplay, with features never before seen in an FPS. You had to use vehicles, operate machinery, call in airstrikes, destroy tanks and helicopters, ram alien creatures onto your arms to use as weapons... But for the first half-hour there wasn't a gun in sight. Instead, the game began with the now famous tram ride opening sequence, setting up the plot, showcasing the game's technology, and giving you an idea of the vast scale of the complex. As the tram's PA system introduced you to the Black Mesa corporate culture – "Do you have a friend or relative who would make a valuable addition to the Black Mesa team?" – you were given tantalising glimpses of the complex's imposing technology, and the mysterious man in a grey suit who would come to haunt your struggle to the surface. On the way from the locker room to your post, colleagues rubbed their chins, tied their shoelaces, made comments like "Most of the simulation results were perfectly acceptable..." and "Weren't you supposed to be in the test chamber half an hour ago?"

Ask the development team about their favourite moments in *Half-Life*, and most will cite the teleportation accident which transforms Black Mesa into a death-trap. Gabe Newell calls his first time through that scene "a big rush"; *Half-Life*'s dialogue and storywriter **Marc Laidlaw** concurs: "I will never forget the first time I played the disaster sequence. We had written and recorded all the audio, but for a long time the voices simply played out in a static test chamber. Then one morning I came in to find all the special effects had been hooked up. I had chills."

Half-Life's plot was vintage Stephen King: horrific experiments, trans-dimensional horrors, betrayal by the army and the government – and Gabe Newell quotes King's novella 'The Mist' as a founding inspiration. "I always thought that people in the game development community had forgotten how immersive and downright scary the FPS perspective had become," he remembers. "Companies were thinking, 'Well if a double-barrel shotgun is good, then a triple-barrel shotgun is even better.' There seemed to be a great opportunity to go back to the roots of what got us all interested in FPS games in the first place, and really let the game give you the experience of a story."

It took the talents of Marc Laidlaw, though, to lift the game's plot, quite literally, into another dimension. The author of half a dozen self-confessedly 'strange' cyberpunk novels, Laidlaw shaped the levels and major events into one consistent narrative, penning the majority of *Half-Life*'s storyline and dialogue. "I had to sort out thematic elements from a stew of random 'cool' gimmicks," he says, rearranging them in such a way that they supported each other and set the pace of the story, while steering away from simplistic missions like 'find the blue key to open the blue door.' Marc also scripted the dialogue and actions that turned the plot at key moments, to great dramatic effect: few players will forget the moment the marines, sent in to save the complex, execute a pleading scientist before turning their guns – in a genuinely shocking *volte-face* – on you.

Superintelligent foes

Half-Life's opponent AI was formidable. If soldiers spotted you ("We have movement!") and you took refuge in a drain or behind a crate, a grenade was guaranteed to clink to a halt at your feet. Monsters responded to different stimuli, including the fearsome killer tentacles that located you by sound; other creatures would take into account where you were headed, whether they outnumbered you, and if they themselves were strong enough to fight. You could respond in kind: lay traps for enemies, or let them fight themselves. As befitted the scenario, patience and intelligent tactics



the half-built office to get samples from a builder's circular saw or nail-gun.

were often your best chance of survival. The game also managed to be cinematic without ever resorting to a thirdperson perspective or narrative interludes.

Animated set-pieces offered some of the game's big horror-comic moments: scientists staggered in fear as enormous creatures dragged them to their doom, zombies feasted on security guards in the cafeteria... Crucial events triggered scripted sequences in which nearby characters released clues and provided the next major destination. "We tried not to lay the story on too thick, but to provide clues in bits and pieces here and there, as part of the action," Laidlaw explains. The author's experience writing fiction helped structure the game in this respect. "We tried to be very deliberate about the most important aspect: the gameplay. As in a short story, every detail must add something to the overall picture – otherwise, it ought to be cut."

Key atmospherics

The *Half-Life* engine was based partly on the *Quake* source code. "We pick and choose where we want," wrote one of the game's designers, **Harry Teasley**, in an interview during development. But where the code wasn't entirely new, the atmosphere was 100% original. Unlike *Quake* and *Doom*, *Half-Life* had no major level loads. The game was structured around chapters and frequent short load times gave play a refreshingly seamless quality. Valve accomplished this by using separate, overlapping maps, which shared object-states between them.

Technically, *Half-Life*'s graphics were something new, though: metallic and glass surfaces, translucent water and energy beams, forcefields that faded in and out... Ken Birdwell's pioneering skeletal animation system gave far more realistic movement than the familiar mesh-based animation from *Doom* or *Quake*: characters' legs bent when they crouched down, etc. Sound also played a crucial part in creating and maintaining the tension in the gloomy Black Mesa compound. The CD score was as openly atmospheric as any Ridley Scott film, and the audio effects appropriately first-rate. From the first hint of Vincent Price in a colleague's comment ("They're waiting for you Gordon... in the... test chamber!"), through echo sound effects in freezer rooms and narrow canyons, to overheard conversations about your own progress ("Forget Freeman," a radio crackles at one point, "we're evacuating the base.") – *Half-Life*'s sound contributed a great deal to the atmospherics. Realism was the priority: Kelly Bailey, the man responsible for the music and sound effects, wasn't averse to strolling across the half-built office to get samples from a builder's circular saw or nail-gun.

Forward-looking

The game's success spawned a franchise of extensions with overlapping plot-lines: *Opposing Force*, in which you play Corporal Adrian Shepherd; and the recent *Blue Shift*, starring security guard Barney Calhoun; as well as a raft of MODs and deathmatch levels designed by gamers at large.

Half-Life won over 50 Game of the Year awards in 1998, and is regularly voted an all-time favourite by avid PC gamers. "One of the most exciting areas in gaming these days is content created by the gaming public," admits Harrington. Indeed, Valve has taken every step to encourage this community, shipping an advanced level designer, *Worldcraft*, with *Half-Life* from day one. Valve has since added a total re-write of the networking layer, integrated voice capability and a multicast spectator mode. *Half-Life* and MODs are by far the most popular online games – and the voice-communication features in the latest release make the title now, at Gabe Newell's reckoning, one of the largest voice-over IP applications running on the Internet.

Marc Laidlaw says it's the newness of games that drew him to the industry. "Books, cinema... It's very hard to find the cutting edge in those fields. But the games industry is still young enough, and teams small enough, that it's possible to play an active role in many aspects of the design process – from building levels to writing the overall story. It's the frontier."

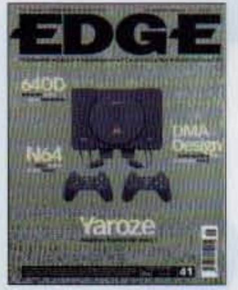
And *Half-Life* is one of our furthest outposts so far...

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 41, January 1997

'Bad Influence' canned, 'GamesMaster's audience down to 1.9million, and 'T.I.G.S.' lying lifeless in an ambivalent world. The end of 1996, and with TV videogame programmes dead in the water, it was time for **Edge** to provide a postmortem. "Computers were tainted with Mike Yarwood syndrome," the magazine declared, before explaining that "the mere mention of them created an atmosphere of resistance and doubt." But the real focus of the issue was an in-depth analysis of Yaroze, Sony's attempt to revitalise bedroom coding, which saw Phil Harrison declaring his intent to "see code listings in **Edge**." Nintendo's 64DD ("[It] will be released in Japan in late 1997") also received a cover mention, as the news section led with a report from the eighth annual Shoshinkai Exhibition. Prescreen Alphas made their debut with first shots of *Zelda 64* and *Yoshi's Story*, while a reminder of more innocent times came in *Out There*. "The star of *Tomb Raider*, Lara Croft, has become something of an icon in recent months" ran **Edge**'s sidestory. "There's even a deal in the offing to bring Lara to Saturday-morning TV as a cartoon." Well, imagine that.



DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"Music Central '97... is a mine of information if '80s prog rock is your kettle of bollocks" **Edge** mixes its metaphors in the cause of sonic analysis

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"No it is fucking not." DMA boss David Jones, in response to **Edge**'s question: "Is *Lemmings* your favourite game?"

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)
Realms of the Haunting (PC; 8/10), *Shadows of the Empire* (N64; 6/10), *Virtua Cop 2* (Saturn; 8/10), *Virtual On* (Saturn; 8/10), *Contra: Legacy of War* (PS; 4/10), *Jet Moto* (PS; 5/10), *Twisted Metal 2* (PS; 7/10), *Wayne Gretzky* (N64; 7/10), *Cruis'n USA* (N64; 4/10), *Killer Instinct Gold* (N64; 6/10)



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1. *Blast Corps*, one of the first two games to use Nintendo's 'Jolting Pack' 2. Tony Crowther's *Realms of the Haunting* 3. The landscape 'J-Culture' page debuts, cleverly titled 'Big In Japan' 4. Toaplan shooter, *Ultimate Tiger* 5. Suikoden offers a compliment to **Edge**'s Art Editor 6. Big Boy Barry and Gail Porter pause and consider the future of 'The Interactive Game Show'

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Emily Newton Dunn, the star of videogame TV review show 'Bits', remembers her first cluck...





Hens' teeth! Emily Newton Dunn cut her milky molars on the BBC Micro's classic *Chuckie Egg*

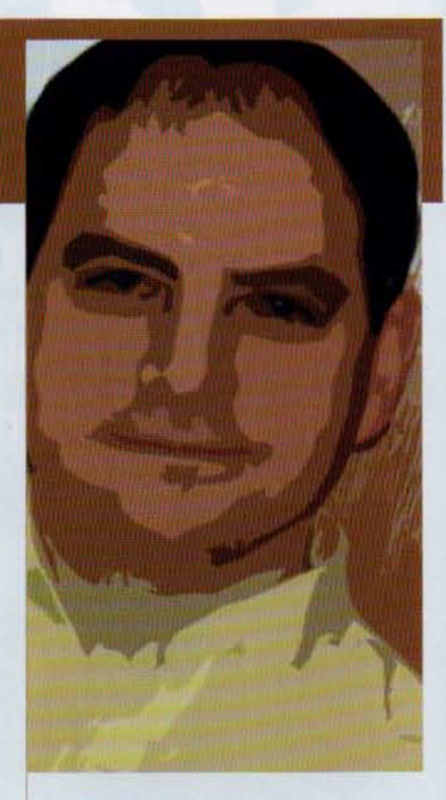
I was a boisterous little kid, always having to literally fight my older brother to have a go on his Spectrum. Computers weren't considered a girl thing back in the early '80s and I was constantly being pushed towards Barbie and Sindy dolls, which I took great pleasure in decapitating. I wanted to play with the big boys and it wasn't until my brother's best friend bought a BBC that I got my chance to prove I was as good as the rest.

God bless *Chuckie Egg* on the BBC! You simply had to direct the farmer to pick up the eggs scattered around the platforms, climbing up and down ladders to get them, while avoiding the ostrich like birds. A world of gaming cunning and deft digits opened up before me when I realised that I kicked ass on this title. Usually I was only allowed one go on any game then told to get lost, but with *Chuckie Egg* I rocked right away and was allowed to carry on. We all marvelled at the later levels, too, when the ladders started moving – which demanded ever increasing skill. From that moment on, I was hooked. Inspired by the classic *Donkey Kong*, *Chuckie Egg* is still a great game today. I even keep an emulator of it on my PC.

FAQ

Philip Oliver

Managing Director, Blitz Games



Blitz Games is an independent games development company, employing over 90 videogame professionals – and at present developing over 50 titles across nearly all platforms. Co-founders Philip and Andrew Oliver (aka 'The Oliver Twins') began writing games on a ZX81 back in 1981, and are jointly responsible for such retro hits as the *Dizzy* and *Simulator* series, as well as a rack of successful Codemasters titles... Here, MD Philip Oliver reflects on glories past, present and future.

What was the first videogame you ever played and what did you think of it?
It was during a Summer holiday in Torquay in about 1979... I was about 12 and Andrew and I were in an arcade looking in awe at *Pac-Man*. We always had a habit of watching but not playing, because these machines were so expensive. But this one time a stranger gave us a pound to put into the machine... I can't remember how long it lasted, but we were so grateful. That's the first 'arcade' game we ever played, and after that we were hooked.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned? What did you think of it?
Back in 1981, I remember going with our older brother Martin to buy a second-hand computer: a Sinclair ZX81 which had only 1K RAM. There was nothing wrong with it, but he still wanted a better one, and I remember wondering why. He explained that he wanted a computer with colour – specifically the Acorn Atom, which had just been released. Before I'd got home I'd already learned about 'upgrading'! Andrew and I weren't ones to go and spend lots of money on software, so we got cracking, trying to make games of our own. The ZX81 had BASIC built in and some type-in programs such as *Pong*. Well, now there was no stopping us. We quickly modified and added to all the listings and discovered quickly that we needed more speed, memory and colour! So we took on a newspaper round to earn some cash – and bought a Dragon 32.

"There are no ceilings, no restrictions – our only limits are our imaginations. Even the limits of technology are solved in time"

What was the first thing you created on it?
We wrote lots of games in BASIC, as well as a couple of tools to help us develop graphics. In those days there were *no* graphic utilities; if people wanted graphics, they drew mosaics on graph paper, converted these to numbers and bytes, and then typed them in as data commands. To draw an 8 x 8 pixel Pac-Man figure could take an hour for a single frame! The first title we had published appeared in January 1984 in 'Computer & Video Games' as a type-in listing called *Road Runner*. It was designed to be neat and elegant – and short, because we knew that typing the listings in was never much fun. We were paid £50 for this and it went towards buying a BBC Model B. These were more popular, but most importantly were designed to be easy to program – both in Basic and Assembler.

What was your first job in the industry?
The type-in game for 'C&VG' was our first job. Neither Andrew nor I have ever drawn a salary from anyone. We've always just written games for clients as 'independent developers'. After C&VG, we wrote for Argos Press, Acornsoft, Interceptor, Players and then for Codemasters, where we had success with the *Simulator* and *Dizzy* series.

What's your favourite game ever and why?
I'd have to go back to the days when I had time to play games – at school in the early '80s. We both played a lot of classic BBC titles, which were often copies of arcade games, things like *Defender, Scramble, Pac-Man* and *Elite*.

What are your top movie and book of all time
'Star Wars,' obviously. Favourite book? 'The Advanced BBC User Guide.'

What was the last game you played and what did you think of it?
It has to be *Mario Kart* on the GBA. But because of work and a young family, I don't get a chance to play much more than our own games.

How many hours a week do you spend playing games?
I try to get in at least half an hour a day.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
The one with the biggest toy attached! Don't you just love those mini-cars, motorbikes and jetskis?

What game would you most liked to have worked on?
I like games that do something different and then become successful – like *Glover*, which we did a couple of years ago. I'd always want to be associated with games that are fun and sell loads. I'm not into epics like *Final Fantasy*, and I don't want to encourage aggressive behaviour, because I believe we have a moral responsibility. I like any Miyamoto game, from his early creations like the original *Donkey Kong* and *Mario*, through to more recent games like *Luigi's Mansion*.

Which Website do you visit most regularly, apart from your own company's?
I wouldn't go anywhere without referencing www.multimap.com first.

Of all the games you've been involved with, which was your favourite and why?
Well, there's a little character called Dizzy, which appears to have lived in the hearts and minds of many people for many years. Amazing really, but it brings it home to you that when we create games we make a *lot* of impressions.

What new developments in videogames would you most like to see?
More fun! Too many people go for epic challenges. Let's try to make games more accessible and sociable.

Whose work do you most admire?
Ed Logg, the man behind *Asteroids*, *Gauntlet* and *Xybots* at Atari, created some incredible and original games in the mid '80s.

What do you enjoy most about working in the industry?
We're having fun and making fun. There are no ceilings – our only limits are our imaginations. Even the limits of technology are solved in time. But where will it all go from here? It's incredible to think about – and to be on the leading edge, making it happen, is amazing.

inbox

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I'm 34 years old and I've been playing videogames since the early days (*Space Invaders*, etc). Recently, however, I've started to get motion sickness when playing titles which feature polygons running at high speed. It started with *Rogue Squadron* on the N64. When I was playing, I started to get hot, and eventually dizzy and nauseous. I put this down initially to the 'fogging' on the N64, because I wasn't experiencing the same problem on other games. But now I'm having trouble completing *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* on PSone – I can't because the later stages have to run at a higher speed and it makes me feel sick.

This is becoming more of a problem, because work/life commitments mean I no longer have the time to play longwinded games such as *Zelda*, *Resident Evil*, etc. I have to grab half-an-hour here and there, and with the bigger, longer kind of games I end up forgetting the plot or not having enough time to run around looking for items.

Here lies the dilemma: I only have time to play games that give that three-minute arcade buzz, which ultimately means that they have to run at high speeds. Am I therefore only going to be able to play old parallax scrollers from now on? Or is there an answer to the problem of motion sickness?

David, via email

What's wrong with old parallax scrollers? Or new ones – courtesy of the GBA – come to that?

In **E**103 you said that you would've liked to "challenge [Phil Harrison's] assertion that videogames offer the best value entertainment per hour." This got me thinking. Exactly just how much 'bang per buck' do I personally get from even the best titles? I consider my knowledge of interactive entertainment to be like that of any other **Edge** reader, and have played a wide variety of games over the years across many platforms.

Bearing this in mind, there are only a handful of games where I can honestly say I've had my money's worth. Each one of these has something in common: a multiplayer dimension. *Quake2* online, *Mario Kart*, *Street Fighter*, *ISS*, *Bomberman* and the like have all delivered huge amounts of supremely enjoyable entertainment.

Dare I say it, even a game such as *Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*, wonderful though it is, has simply not provided value for money, especially when you're shelling out for import games, as I'm sure a large proportion of your readership do. For damage limitation, I spend a lot of time reading game reviews before parting with my hard-earned cash. It's my chosen hobby and I enjoy collecting knowledge on games almost as much as I do playing the things.

Other people, such as the so called 'casual gamer' demographic, choose to spend more of their time on other social activities. They may only buy two or three games a year (how many people do you know whose games collection consists of *FIFA 98*, *Tomb Raider 2* and *Final Fantasy 7*?).

Perhaps that useful old adage "Once bitten, twice shy" is particularly apt here. To spend £45 on a new game, get it home and for it to be of average quality at best is going to put anyone off doing the same thing the following month, especially someone who can quite easily spend their money on other pursuits.

The industry must find new ways of selling games. *Doom* seems so long ago now, with the introduction of a free trial version and an option to buy at the end of it. Of course, thanks in no small part to this, nearly every new PC game now comes as some form of demo or movie download prior to release. Great if you're a PC fanatic, but what about the PlayStation generation ?

Perhaps we're almost there with the introduction of broadband-enabled consoles. If they can offer a menu full of the latest demos for us to 'try before we buy,' then there'll be less chance of us getting our fingers burnt. Free demos, cheap purchase of episodic content, no risk.

It could finally give below par publishers and development outfits a well needed kick up the backside if they can no longer rely on uninformed and impressionable consumers.

Jamie Cunningham, via email

In **Edge**'s opinion you're wrong about *Ocarina of Time*. But you're right to lament publishers' short-termism. The current software pricing structure, combined with too many mediocre releases, is hardly going to turn a casual customer into a long-term one.

I read with great interest your article on the early days of the videogame magazine industry (**E**102). One aspect that really struck a chord was how uncompromising and honest many of these early titles were, particularly 'Zzap64!' and 'Amiga Power'. When these magazines recommended a game, the odds were heavily in the buyer's favour that it would be money well spent. They truly seemed to care about their readership – a far cry from many of today's pitiful offerings.

It's well recognized that part of the reason for the massive decline in the printed magazine market is that fewer people are prepared to pay good money for what is often little more than a glorified 'flyer'. Perhaps those few **Edge** readers who still insist on bemoaning your stringent review policy should



If, like David, you suffer from motion sickness when faced with next-generation poly counts, perhaps you should try the Game Boy Advance



Jay Smith calls for resistance to censorship. But isn't developers' eagerness to embrace hackneyed depictions of violence getting stale?

appreciate that your magazine stands as perhaps the last of its kind.

I would also like to take this opportunity to tell you of a little project that some of your readers may be interested in. I am one of several people currently involved in the production of a new issue of 'Zzap64!' This non-profit making project will be available for download from the Net in the New Year and is very much a labour of love. Several ex-'Zzap64!' staff members are involved. Edited by none other than Gordon Houghton, the magazine will include reviews for six 'brand new' and previously unreviewed C64 games, as well as articles, features and the return of Lloyd Mangram. At the moment, it is intended as a one-off project, but should it prove popular enough, future issues could follow. Anyone wishing to learn more should visit the message board at www.zzap64.co.uk.

Andy Haywood, York

I noticed recently that many games such as *Driver*, *Ace Combat 4*, *Soldier of Fortune* and even *Metal Gear Solid 2* have come under increasing scrutiny with regard to their subject matter that may at times touch on the areas of terrorism, being nasty in any way, or any combination of the two in relation to the US.

As technology advances it does, of course, facilitate the opportunity for extreme and suspect agendas to find their way into the medium of games, but this is nothing new and has been an issue in many different media, be it newspapers, TV, cinema or games.

It's all a matter of context. It's time for the games industry to cease to pander to those in society whose social, political and religious views are on the fringes and who try to impose their own personal subjective opinions on the medium. Games are creative and imaginative entertainment, with the likes of *Mario 64* being a work of art open to interpretation and wonder, and not a political statement on the subjugation of ethnic minorities in the plumbing trade.

What I'm suggesting is that the industry should be less concerned with self-regulation and censorship and more concerned with the attempts to impose censorship upon it from the politically motivated and highly influential minority interest groups outside of the industry.

Of course, titles like *Kingpin* will always invite healthy criticism, but such titles do not turn individuals into gun-toting psychopaths, just as by playing the games backwards you do not discover a secret coded message from the devil. That said, someone will have, but they should take that issue up with a professionally trained counsellor or psychiatrist – and not their local MP.

Interpretation should be done by the player, not the agenda of the programmer or an outside political agency. I guess the likes of Molyneux have it sussed with games like *Black & White*, where the player constructs their own moral framework in which to operate. That must really give the conservative press a headache.

Jay Smith, via email

While **Edge** sympathises with your libertarian stance, it can't help wondering if too many developers are prepared to peddle the same sort of derivative, violent, morally reductive nonsense – justifying creative indolence with similar arguments.

The phenomenal sales of the PS2 have ensured that Sony will have a significant say in the development of the console industry. While there is much anticipation of broadband network gaming, I think there is much work to be done on the basics.

For example, where is the 60Hz full-screen option on PAL titles? (How was Sega so successful in getting developers to implement this option? And why do we want anything more than 24/30 frames a second? If it's good enough for TV...)

Where is the widescreen aspect ratio option? Surely these tweaks would give some highly visible added value to gamers without adding significant development cost?

Lee Wilson, via email

I was in complete agreement with Steven Poole's article on Mass Appeal up until he said he would rather play *FIFA* instead of *ISS*. I understand his point about great script, but I think the actors, cinematography, direction, etc, are all good enough in *ISS* to keep me playing that title rather then *FIFA* any day of the year. I've personally converted all my PSone and PS2-owning buddies from *FIFA* to *ISS* disciples.

Next stop, AV Out. I'm currently doing a CIM course in Marketing and I'm being taught that true Market Orientation is finding out the wants and needs of the customer and then making a product that matches those needs and wants. Mr Toshihiro Nagoshi says he refuses to believe Marketing comes before content. Where does **Edge** stand on this matter. Market Orientated or Product Orientated?

Last but not least: the Videogame Diary. Matthew Gabriel mentions that it's interesting to note at gameshows the difference between the type of game a developer would want to play and the type of game that actually sells. Hardcore market versus mass market. He thinks it is a good idea to let the consumers visit gameshows so the developer can

'There are only a handful of games where I can say I've had my money's worth. Each one has something in common: a multiplayer dimension'



Super Mario 64 – an undisputed killer app in gaming terms. But did Nintendo set the bar too high for other GameCube developers?

get to meet the customer (and not just the retail buyer). I agree with him. At the end of the day, it's Joe Public that will be paying the hard-earned cash that keeps us all in the industry.

I think this is a great reason to open up ECTS to the consumers for a least a day. There are always going to be games that creative and talented people will want to – and should – make. But in today's economic climate, these must also be backed up with games that will appeal and sell.

Nana Penemo, via email

It's all very well creating games that will appeal and sell, but one of the biggest problems with the videogame industry today is that it tries to do just that by slavishly imitating existing titles. **Edge** would like to see a few more developers attempting to give the public what it doesn't know it wants.

I can't be a casual gamer, can I? I love playing on my Dreamcast – *Get Bass, Samba De Amigo, House of the Dead 2, Virtua ON* – mostly because they use their own little device for playing with, which makes them much more of an arcade experience, while giving me a 25-minute blast of pure fun. Classification: Casual Gamer

But I've played *Xenogears, Parasite Eve, Chrono Cross*, and loved them all, right down to the last nigh-on-impossible final bosses. I'm eagerly awaiting *Xenosaga* and *Harvest Moon: Save the Homelands* on PS2. I can't wait to spend hours of my time playing a game that I doubt I'll play again after I've finished it. Classification: Serious Gamer

Now if I were to disclose to you that, between my and husband and I, we have nearly every console made, from Game Boy and Virtual Boy to PS2s (one American, one English, because who knows where European gamers will get left out again) and an Atari 2600. A veritable collection, with the finest (and most obscure) games on each platform. Classification: Game Freak

But I don't spend every hour of every day playing games. I only really spend an hour or two in the evening shaking my maracas, getting the biggest bass or talking with my Seaman.

I don't think people should be shunned for being casual gamers or laughed at for being a FPS nerd. What's important is the fact that, like it or not, *all* gamers have one thing in common: playing the games. So why not enjoy it?

Liz Korbey, via email

After reading many issues of **Edge**, I'm in great confusion as to what platform to go for. I currently own a PS2 and I'm quite happy with its performance. However, after reading all the hype regarding the GameCube and the Xbox, I really don't know which one to buy next year. Should I opt for the absolute power of the Xbox? Or the ability to play great Nintendo games?

Pete Martin, via email

All three machines have their strengths and weaknesses: PS2 has the market penetration, Xbox the sheer clout and Nintendo the intellectual properties (although given Nintendo's attitude towards the European launch, it may well have taken itself out of the equation). Given the quality of the latest software releases – and the current price of the platform – it certainly looks like a PS2 is your best option. For a full-lowdown on all three systems, see the next issue of **Edge**, on sale December 29.

Could Nintendo's decision to launch its new console without what might seem a killer app be a chosen strategy? Consider the launch of the N64... The console appeared with *Super Mario 64*, arguably one of the finest videogames ever created. To a thirdparty publisher, that must be like a boxer knocking you out in the first round. By launching the GameCube with less than stellar firstparty software, Nintendo ensures that the spotlight is on the thirdparty producers. At least until games such as the new *Mario* are released.

So how did the fact that the N64's best game was also its first affect sales? Maybe it set the bar too high for other producers to consider even trying. If you look at PSone, for example, its games have evolved over the years, keeping players and developers interested in what might be around the corner. In the N64's case, there were no corners. *Mario 64* made it a very straight road.

Jesper Koefoed, Sweden

An interesting take on the situation. Would anyone else like to comment?

I was happily reading my way through **E**103 when I stumbled across Oliver Tilley's email about turn-based battles. I just want to tell him that even though I love this type of battle, it's not the be-all-and-end-all of RPG battle systems. For starters, although it's much easier to grasp, it can get a little tedious; real-time battles, on the other hand, require reactions and skill. If all he looks for in an RPG or strategy game is turn-based battles, then he's truly missing on some fantastic adventures!

Finally, everyone should stop fighting about which console is better... Surely they should be spending that time enjoying their games instead of being twats? I own several consoles and I love them all equally. Why can't everyone just be grateful for the consoles and games they've got?

Sherona, Durham

'Everyone should stop fighting about which console is better... Surely they should be spending time enjoying their games, instead of being twats?'







Choosing your ideal system involves more than just selecting the machine with the supposedly 'better' specs...

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet

Topic: **Cognitive Friction**
From: **Furoshiki**
Okay, here's the deal: I'm a graphic designer. Those of you who also know a bit about design (not in the Lawrence Llewelyn-Bowen "trust me, I'm a designer" sense) may also know about John Maeda. He's very hip at the moment, kind of the Rem Koolhaas of screen-based graphic/interface design.

The thing is, I reckon he – and many others like him – are just mucking about. Doing things like Tipp-Exing® out the letters on a keyboard to 'reveal its true nature' or whatever. Or writing programs to do nonsense like randomly drawing squares, triangles and circles until every pixel is coloured. Good grief, I was doing that shit on my Spectrum when I was 10.

But anyway, before I start ranting, this is my point: videogame designers have got interface design down pat. If you look at the complexity of the tasks the player is executing, and the seamlessness of the best control systems, nothing the supposedly intellectual new media designers are doing can touch the 'lowbrow' game designs. Prime examples of these include: *Mario 64*, *Zelda 64*, *Phantasy Star Online*, and, my all-time favourite, the ring system in *Secret of Mana*. Poetry.

One only has to use the doggy touch-screen ticket machines on the London Underground to instantly encounter cognitive friction in day-to-day life. They require effort. Even those who know the system have trouble finding the ticket they want. Those who don't, get bewildered and nervous as the queue of tutting commuters builds up behind them. There is something seriously wrong here.

Necessity is the mother of invention, and videogames have to be intuitive – in order to be fun, in order to be easy to pick up, and (most significantly) in order to sell. It's a prerequisite. There's no apparent similar pressure on those who design things like ticket machines, or 99.9% of Web sites. Designers could get their collective act together and learn an awful lot from videogames.

Is it as simple as I've made it out to be? Are we hamstrung by our knowledge of existing interfaces? How significant a part does the controller play in this?

Topic: **Gaming Experiment**
Poster: **DreamcastMaster**
This week, three of my friends and I are going to the pub, and we're going to sit round the table with our pints and fourplayer *Mario Kart*. Post-pub gaming? Pah, that's so passé. In-pub gaming's where it's at now. I've chosen the quiet local pub on my estate, not one of the trendy city centre venues, and the group have agreed to suspend gaming should any attractive women appear on the scene. I'll let you know the results...

Poster: **DreamcastMaster**
Okay, and now for the night's results. It was unusually busy in my local this Friday, and we had to wait for a table to become free before we could start our *Mario Kart* session. After a brief wait, we managed to get a perfect table with a nicely positioned halogen spotlight overhead, which provided great light for the GBA screen.

There was one older couple looking at us and muttering away disapprovingly shaking their heads. Nobody else paid any attention, because they were all too busy chatting and drinking in their own groups. What was interesting is that this couple didn't care that they were next to the loudest group of beered-up girls ever, but three guys with Game Boys were looked down on.

So, in conclusion, gaming still has a social stigma, but if you don't worry about what other people think then you'll be fine. We plan to have another session next Friday.

Topic: **Tetris Chocolate Orange**
Poster: **Welsh**
No-one Lives For Revels?

Poster: **ukdazs**
Microsoft Flyte Simulator?

From: **flicky**
Phantasy Star On-Lion Bar?

From: **Jomps**
Wham Bar de Amigo?

From: **Tito Juentez**
Super Haribo Bros?

'This week, three of my friends and I are going to the pub to play fourplayer *Mario Kart*. Post-pub gaming? Pah, that's so passé'

Next month

Let battle commence.

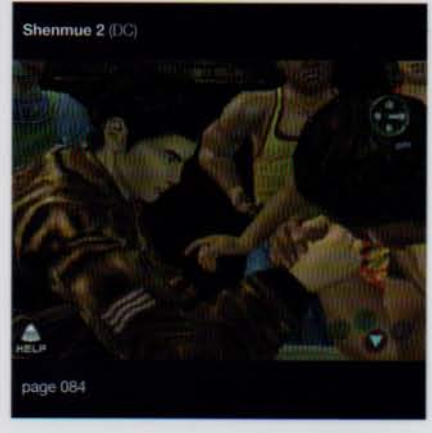



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